

THE GREAT GOD

A Course of
Sermons on the Divine Attributes

BY

VERY REV. TIHAMER TOTH

Professor, University of Budapest

TRANSLATED BY

V. G. AGOTAI

EDITED BY

REV. NEWTON THOMPSON, S.T.D.

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I

GOD A SPIRIT

Do you know the legend of the veil of Sais? That pitiful and awful legend of a foolhardy youth? According to an old Egyptian tale the origin of the gods and of life itself was to be found in the goddess Isis, whose picture, hidden beneath a purple and golden veil, was guarded at Sais. It was believed that whosoever lifted the veil covering the picture, would learn the deepest secrets of the faith. No one, however, was permitted to lift the veil except the priests in the service of the goddess.

But once there lived a youth who could not master his fiery thirst for knowledge. At any cost he must know more of the Godhead. Stealing into the temple in the dead of night, with trembling fingers he lifted the veil.

He never told anyone what he saw; because, when the priests entered the temple next morning, they found that foolhardy youth—deathly pale, dumb, and bereft of his senses—stretched full-length on the floor. What had driven him out of his mind? What, but that he had indeed seen: he had seen into the innermost depths of the pagan faith. He had seen that the whole was a great fraud, because there was nothing beneath the veil: only a gaping void.

My brethren, our holy Christian faith does not fear the lifting of the veil. Not only does it not fear, but it calls to us: "Draw nearer to God. Let Him not remain a distant veiled and hidden picture for you. Speak of Him often, think of Him and—so far as mortal human mind is able to—endeavor to know Him more profoundly."

THE GREAT GOD

But will it not be dangerous to think of God very much, to speak much of Him, to reason about Him? Shall we not fare as that youth of Sais fared? I am not afraid, brethren. Let us set out boldly on our way. I know, it is my sacred conviction, that no such fate as his awaits us; on the contrary, with deep emotion in our hearts and faith renewed and fortified, we shall fall upon our knees before our better known, better loved, and sublime God.

WHO SHALL LEAD?

Reason alone can lead us on our way toward God. From reason we may ask: Is there a God? And we receive the decided answer: There must be a sublime and mighty Someone, whom we call God. Reason takes us near Him, but there it stops; before the veiled God it stops and is incapable of proceeding farther.

The magnetic needle guides the explorer's vessel toward the North Pole, but when it reaches the mysterious vicinity of the Pole, it becomes restless and ceases to function. Just so, the reasoning powers of man become uncertain and insufficient when approaching close to the secret of secrets, in God's vicinity.

The wisest men among the heathens felt the weightiness of this problem. Hiero, ruler of Syracuse, put this question to Simonides the philosopher: "Answer me, what is God?" The philosopher asked to be given one day in which to consider. The one day passed, and then he asked for two more days. Then four, then eight. At last, when the king became impatient, Simonides said: "The more I ponder this question, the more difficult it is to answer" (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, 22). See how men strive to lift the veil by human reasoning, and are unable to do so by that alone.

Then must we be content to know that God exists, but

yet be unable to learn more about Him? O no, brethren. We cannot be satisfied with that. Reason itself tells us something of the attributes of God. And when reason ceases to be of help, then a mighty hand comes to aid us lift the veil—the strong hand of faith.

i) What is God like? Human reason speaks of this, too. It fails to tell us very much, it is true, but it does tell us something. Not only that God is, but something about how great, how all-inclusive, and how mighty He must be.

God. Is there any spot in the whole world where that sacred name is strange, unknown? The shepherd lifts his eyes to heaven and adores Him at the coming of the dawn. The invalid cries to Him, the sufferer prays to Him. The wicked icar Him, the good hope in Him. Before Him little children kneel, and to Him the aged sigh. From Him the poor await help, and before Him kings bow down. We know that God is All to all men.

God. Each star in the firmament, each blade of grass in the field, each fish in the sea, each bird in the air, each flower in the meadow, each grain of sand upon the seashore and each drop of water in the ocean—each bears eloquent testimony to the greatness of God. "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee. Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall tell. Who is ignorant in all these that the hand of the Lord hath made all these things?" (Job 12:7-9.) "For every house is built by some man: but he that created all things, is God" (Heb. 3:4).

This wonderful world is revolving round us; has been revolving with the greatest precision for billions of years perhaps, and its millions of gigantic celestial bodies run their course punctually. Crowds gaze curiously into a watchmaker's shop-window. Under a glass cover stands a clock with this notice: "Needs to be wound only once in four hundred days." Everyone is amazed at the clock and at its maker. But see, here is the infinitely more beautiful

and more complicated world-mechanism, and it never needs to be wound. How wise, how mighty, how infinite the Creator of the world must be! Reason tells me that, too.

"Cease not to turn the leaves of Nature's eternal book: the picture of God is inscribed therein." So speaks Vorosmarty the poet; and everyone who walks with observant eyes and contemplative thoughts among the countless beauties of this world, will say he is right.

2) But this picture which Nature gives of God, is obscure, uncertain, insufficient; we have need of a much clearer picture. That God is, that God must exist—man's own reason tells him that. But the idea of the Deity which we gain from reason alone is narrow, indeterminate, and mostly cold and gloomy. God is, says reason. But what God is like can be learnt only from God Himself. "Neither doth anyone know the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27).

And see, brethren, here comes a strong and mighty power to assist in lifting the veil: the helping hand of faith, the Holy Scriptures, and the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, all of them speaking to us of God.

It is customary to set up a telescope at certain frequented heights; upon payment of a few cents, anyone may look through it and delight in the panorama of the surrounding mountain-tops. We stand beside the person who is looking through the telescope and hear his exclamations: "What rocks, what depths, what precipices! How beautiful, how magnificent!" We others do not see these, but believe the person who has his eye to the telescope. The Lord Christ had eyes which saw into eternity. We will therefore stand at His side and at the side of Holy Writ, and we will listen to what they say of God. Reason tells us only that God is great, infinitely majestic, and mighty. But how much more our faith tells us of Him and of our Lord Christ!

Only since the revelation of our Lord Jesus can we truly

say who God is. "Who seeth me, seeth the Father," Jesus once said; and since then we know that God is like the Lord Christ, the God of righteousness, who awaits us all in His eternal bliss; the God of justice, who rewards or punishes us for our every act; the God of holiness, who abhors sin; the God of patience, who does not condemn the sinner at once; the God of mercy, who embraces every penitent. Lord Christ, how many sublime attributes of God hast Thou made known to us. All this we shall consider later. Truly we shall walk on dizzy heights above immeasurable precipices, but we have no need to fear—Christ clasps our hands firmly.

Then let us start out upon our great journey. Where do the first steps lead? Today we will take only two steps, but by those two steps taken in the light of faith we already rise to astounding heights.

II

ONE GOD

"I believe in one God." Thus our confession of faith begins, and that is our first step today. I believe in one only God. We cannot even rightly estimate what an immense spiritual treasure is contained in the knowledge that God is one. In Christian countries every little child prays: "I believe in one God," God is one only. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut. 6:4). Thus spake Moses to his people, and, in spite of the idolatry practiced all around them, that race, though few in number, kept their faith in one God. And that faith became the foundation of our Christian Credo: "*Credo in unum Deum*, I believe in one God."

Is there a religious truth which we consider so self-evident, so natural as that one? Yet only after terrible wanderings in wrong directions did man reach this haven. In the midst of many gross blunders mankind lived for

thousands of years, while the numerous gods of pagan idolatry grinned and smirked.

Today we can hardly realize what struggles and sacrifices Christianity suffered, until that truth, which seems so clear to us, became humanity's common treasure. For it the blood of early Christian martyrs was shed, for the belief in one God. Missioners faced unknown perils for this same belief in one God. They gave up family life, earthly comforts, the joys of this world, and often life itself, for the belief in one God.

So, if we now find our Christian faith, our belief in one God, so very natural, let us remember with deepest gratitude those whose apostolic work enabled us to progress thus far. In every race now Christian, the early spread of the faith had its own apostles. And let us not fail to assist, with prayer and material sacrifice, those blessed souls who struggle in the missions, that in place of pagan idols the altars of the one true God may be erected.

One more thing we should especially not forget. The old idols of the heathens have been overthrown in our midst, it is true, but in how many hearts have the modern heathen idols taken their place—the false gods of greed, immorality, and pride? For “no man can serve two masters,” we cannot serve the one true God and idols, too. One God.

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GOD IS A SPIRIT

While the Lord Jesus was teaching, He passed through the Holy Land and went also into Samaria, a country which the Jews usually avoided. During the captivity of the Israelites in Babylon, the Samaritans at home intermarried with heathens, mingled heathen customs with their own, and therefore the returning Jews no longer accepted them as brethren. These Samaritans built a separate temple for themselves on Mount Gerizim.

Here in Samaria the Lord Jesus walked and in the vicinity of the town He sat down by the side of a well, Jacob's well. A woman of Samaria came from the town to draw water, when a most solemn conversation took place between our Lord and the woman. We cannot read this narrative in the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel without emotion, for at last the agonized question breaks from the woman's lips: Lord, where is God to be worshiped.' 'Our fathers adored on this mountain, and you say, that at Jerusalem is the place where men must adore' (John 4:20). And then the Savior made that assertion of His which has been the steadfast basis of our whole belief in God since that time: "God is a spirit; and they that adore Him, must adore Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

What is God? God is a spirit. Let us consider this, dear brethren. The six-year-old child at school now learns this truth here with us, but not even the wisest men can evolve it in its entirety.

1) God is a spirit. First, that means that He has no body. This is an everyday, well-known truth among us, among Christians. But now the same sad aberrations which prevailed thousands of years ago again start up before our eyes: yes, the pitiful ignorance of the heathens of our own times. Even today there are hundreds of millions who imagine God to be in graven images, in fetishes, in idols, in the sun, or in fire, and worship Him in these things. But not only the ignorant negroes and Papuans of Australia do I pity, but I pity the civilized heathens, the learned, scholarly heathens who live among us, who also think of God as material, who hold the world, the universe, the elements of the universe, its heartless, soulless, blind forces to be God. True, the titanic force which projected chains of mountains many thousands of feet high from the seething womb of the earth must be very powerful. But has this force a will, can it be God? The wonder of spring fascinates us when the warm sunlight smiles upon us; but to despair-

ing, struggling, bleeding hearts, can such a God give answer? No, brethren: God is a spirit.

2) Now comes another lesson. "God is a spirit" and, because He is a spirit, it is difficult for us—made, as we are, of body and soul—to picture Him to ourselves. God is a spirit, therefore we who are soul and body cannot speak of God precisely. Isaias, the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, heard these words from God: "For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Is. 55:9).

Therefore we cannot emphasize sufficiently that, since God is a spirit, without a body, then we can speak of Him only in our imperfect human manner. We must never forget that, when we speak of God, our utterances, our mode of expressing ourselves, our comparisons are all taken from our human life; as we are human, we cannot think or speak otherwise. Therefore we must always keep in mind that when we, and Holy Writ also, speak of "His eye," "His hand," "His throne," and the like, we are expressing ourselves humanly and imperfectly. The Scriptures speak of God's "throne" to make His supremacy in some measure perceptible: they speak of "His right hand," of "His finger" to symbolize His might, and of "His eye" to proclaim His omniscience. But we should bear in mind that we do not take these expressions literally; they are merely human figures of speech.

I must resign myself to the fact that, with my finite little human powers of reasoning, I am incapable of understanding the infinite God fully and that I cannot speak of Him with exactness. Furthermore, not even the most brilliant human mind can do so. What are we, compared to that genius, St. Augustine? Yet he wrote: "God is unutterable. I can more easily say what He is not, than what He is. The earth is not God, nor the sea. And what is in

the sea and in the air, that is all not God. And what shines in the heavens, the stars, the sun, the moon, these are all not God. . . . Do you wish to know what God is? What eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man. And if it has not entered into the heart of man, how shall it rise to his lips?" (*In Ps.* 85:12.)

If St. Augustine said that, there is nothing else for us to do, except to bow our heads humbly and acknowledge that we are unable to conceive a precise idea of God, because God is a spirit. We can lay stress on one or other of His attributes, to bring Him nearer to our comprehension, to form some kind of picture of Him. But to define God is impossible for us.

Do we, then, know nothing about God? We do not know Him in His entirety, since He "inhabiteth light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (I Tim. 6:16). But as much as we can learn of Him by the light of our faith, will show Him to us in dazzling splendor.

What is God like? Following in the path already trodden by the teachings of our faith, we behold a very wonderful picture of God unfold, but we cannot say that it is perfect, precise, or altogether clear. A human soul dwelling in flesh cannot approach quite near to God. "We see now through a glass in a dark manner" (I Cor. 13:12). But do you know when we shall gain an absolutely clear picture of God, when every veil will be lifted? When eternal light shines upon us, then, by that resplendence, we shall see God.

It is an ancient custom of ours that, when the earth is falling in muffled thuds upon the coffin of someone dear to us, we call our last farewell in these words: "May perpetual light shine upon him." That short prayer contains every good thing that we can possibly wish for our departed. Eternal light. Where light is, there we see; where perpetual light or the very greatest light is, there we see

all, we see God. "May perpetual light shine upon him"; that means: "May he see God." And to see God means for man the greatest happiness; that is joy eternal.

In the Old Testament we find that man had a dim perception that this must be the greatest happiness, to see the original source of all things—God. Therefore Moses besought God: "Show me Thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). St. Paul goes still further, for he is ready to bear the greatest afflictions joyfully and to suffer persecutions, if by paying that price he may come to see God. (II Cor., chap. II.) And the Lord Jesus cannot promise His most combative followers, the martyrs of spiritual chastity, a greater reward: "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

Brethren, we shall see God. We Christians are the people struggling from darkness toward the light. In the darkness which engulfs us in this earthly life we lift our heads to the eternal light even as a little plant lifts its pale tendrils from the damp darkness of some cellar toward the blessed sunlight.

O Lord, grant that this little plant may not wither.

O Lord, grant that no scorching winds of evil may shrivel it.

O Lord, grant that the storms of life may not rend it; that, in the moment of my earthly farewell, it may be said: "Brother, may you see God and know joy eternal. May perpetual light shine upon you." Amen.

II

GOD OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

THE Catholic Creed begins with these remarkable words: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty." What is remarkable in that confession of faith? That we believe in God? By no means. Our powers of reasoning, our hearts, our past, our future, our earthly and our eternal life compel us to do that. Then what? The fact that we Christians dare to call God "our Father."

Of course, today this is such an accustomed everyday thing for us, that we cannot imagine it was once different. But we have to thank our Lord Jesus Christ alone for this sublime knowledge. Hellas and Rome did not know the Father in God. Buddha did not see Him as such, Mohammed did not proclaim Him thus. Not even the chosen people of the Old Testament thought of Him as "Father." For them God was a stern master who gave His orders to an accompaniment of thunder and lightning and who strictly punished their transgressions even unto later generations. Hence the extreme fear that filled the Hebrews and that to us is almost inconceivable. One consequence of this fear was that they did not dare to utter the name of God.

And then the Lord Jesus appears, and from His lips falls the unbelievable word, "Abba, Father; our Father." Brethren, this was the thrilling moment of the lifting of the veil at Sais. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself lifted the veil from the picture of God, and beneath it we saw . . . we saw the sacred, uplifting, life-giving reality—God as our Father.

The Lord Jesus never ceased repeating that God is not a merciless master looking upon us as His slaves, or a businessman with whom one can make a bargain after the manner of the Pharisees; but He is our sympathizing, great-hearted, loving Father.

"In the beginning God created heaven and earth." Thus begin the Holy Scriptures in the Old Testament, and these first words show us the mighty, infinitely wise and powerful God, the source and creator of everything that is. That Old Testament picture of the Deity receives its complement in the New Testament: God is not only mighty, He is also love; He is not only a strict Judge, seeing that His laws are obeyed, He is also a helpful Father, strengthening us to keep His laws. "Our Father" (Matt. 6:9).

WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR

The first thought, nearest to our human reasoning and most naturally occurring to us, is this: If God is our Father, then we have nothing to fear, for He surely cares for us.

What an encouraging, fortifying thought: We have nothing to fear, either in life or in death.

1) We have nothing to fear in life. Our whole earthly life is nothing but fear. The small boy fears examination-time in school; the young man fears that he will not obtain a position; the man fighting in the struggle for life fears a thousand difficulties; the aged fear illness and their approach to the dark door through which each one must pass. But now in the midst of these fears Holy Writ interposes: "The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture" (Ps. 22:1).

"Be not afraid." How can we be afraid, when we read in more than thirty passages in the Holy Scriptures: "Be not afraid"? It is good to hear that: "Be not afraid." But let us have a care that we understand aright. Does Holy

Writ say: "Do not work"? No. "Do not trouble about a livelihood"? No. "Do not exert yourself or tire yourself"? No. But: "Be not afraid." That is: "Work, trusting in God. Trusting that your little boat will not be upset by every wind. Be not afraid that you will sink. Trust in Me. Trust in the heavenly Father."

In whom or in what should we trust otherwise? In our muscular arms? They can easily become limp. In our youth? It passes so quickly. In our vitality? It is so fragile. In men? Well, we can trust in them also, but usually those who are good to us cannot assist us; and those who can do not want to.

Now hear the words of our Lord Jesus, when speaking of our earthly needs: "Your Father knoweth that you have need of these things" (Luke 12:30). Who knows? Does your mighty Creator know? Does your strict Lawgiver know? Does your just Judge know? No. The Lord does not say this. He says: "your Father knoweth." How good it is for us that we have a Father, a strong and mighty Father!

A mighty hurricane raged at sea, and a big ship was tossed by the heaving waves as if it had been a nutshell. The terrified passengers were panic-stricken, panting and screaming: but, during the uproar, a child played quietly, the captain's little son. At last the vessel reached port safely. The passengers questioned the child curiously, asking him how he had been able to remain so calm in danger, and whether he had not been afraid. "Afraid? Why, the helm was in my father's hand," replied the child with touching simplicity.

The helm is in my Father's hand. If we could only say that when trouble comes to us; in every dark path in life, where we must wander. If only we could say in the days of desolation, as Jesus our Lord said: "I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (John 16:32). If only we could say with the Psalmist: "But I have put my trust in Thee, O Lord. I said: Thou art my God. My lots are in Thy hands"

(Ps. 30:15). "The Lord ruleth me; and I shall want nothing. . . . For though I should walk in the midst *of* the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me" (Ps. 22).

2) *Not even* in the valley of the shadow of death. If we have a Father, then we have a home, an eternal home. Then we can answer the most torturing question which this earthly existence propounds. Which is the most torturing question? Why, this: the gigantic machinery of the world rumbles, revolves, grinds, all strive and toil endlessly; but to what purpose? Why do we live? That we may die. Is that an answer? Why do we live? That we may be of use to others. But is that an answer? We may ask once again: "Then why do those others live?" We all struggle and suffer; is there any object in it? Are we progressing or retrogressing? Should we be optimists or pessimists? Is our life a falling leaf, an ocean-wave that disappears leaving no trace? Or are the wide-open gates of our eternal home waiting for us in God's kingdom?

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty." That is, I have a Father who awaits me. And before my death I will say in our Lord's words: "I go to the Father" (John 16:10). And I will say: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Oh, how good it is for us that God is our Father, divine Providence, our Father who cares for us!

II

GOD, THE RULER OF THE UNIVERSE

Here, brethren, I have mentioned two words which I must not pass over lightly: the words, "divine Providence." It is enough to read a newspaper any day of the week with its reports of catastrophes, suffering, and unhappiness, to understand that there is hardly any article of faith which arouses so much doubt in many breasts as the belief

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in divine Providence, the thought of a heavenly Father. And it often happens that we ourselves, faithful Christians though we be, need all our strength to calm and disperse our own doubts: Is God truly our Father, who cares for us?

Oh, what murmurings! Where is the Father, where is divine Providence? I called to Him from the depths, but He did not hear me. I prayed to Him, wringing my hands on the steps of His altar, but He did not turn to me. I was true to Him all my life, yet now the ship will sink with me. I have kept His commandments all my life, yet He does not destroy the germs of tuberculosis that are gnawing the tree of my life. When the lightning strikes, when the river overflows its banks, when men are dying by thousands in some fearful epidemic, when helpless children are orphaned, where is divine Providence? There is no divine Providence, but only fate, hard, merciless destiny. It is written in the stars.

Brethren, how many tortured souls have harbored this numbing thought: There is no Providence, no Providence. What shall we reply? What shall we reply?

x) Were I to take my task lightly, do you know what I could reply? I could point to the other group, to those who sing with hearts full of gratitude: "But there is a Providence." We were in indescribable misery, and help came at the last moment. The doctor had given up all hope of our sick mother's life being spared, and still she recovered at the last moment. Two street cars collided, and even now I do not know how I escaped injury. It seemed as if all my work would be in vain, and at last it succeeded. There is a Providence. I could make such a reply.

But I feel that the question is not settled with such an answer. It is not enough for me to tell those who complain: "You are wrong. See how many believe, despite their suffering, in a Father who cares for them." But I must say: "Listen to me, my suffering fellow-men. I should like to give you a few thoughts to help you, even in the midst of all this

earthly woe, to become members of that camp of triumphant believers."

2) What are these thoughts? First, here is the order of the world and all that is included in that—the consistency of the laws of nature. God created the order of the world, placed it under certain laws; and we cannot expect God to upset this order for our sakes. The forces of nature are stronger than man, and the Lord did not promise that whoever believes in Him shall have no more troubles in this world, and no more pains, but that, if we trust in Him, we shall have strength to overcome pain. God created not only human life, but also the law of gravity. If a tile becomes loose on a roof, it falls: that is the law governing it, that is the order of the world. And if your little son, passing beneath that roof, is killed by the falling tile, you must not blame Providence for that.

And when we come to explain trouble, we must not forget that what is a blow to one, may perhaps be a blessing for very many others. The hurricane carried the roof off your house perhaps, but it also cleared the oppressively sultry air. A continuous rain made impossible the excursion you had planned long before, and you were annoyed; but, had the rain not come, there would be no harvest. The Loid God in His wisdom knows better.

3) Here we have arrived at the truly explanatory thought: the wisdom of the eternal God. Let us read Sophocles' *King Oedipus* reflectively; we shall then realize clearly what the Redemption and the divine Providence proclaimed by the Redeemer, mean to us. What a devastating tragedy unfolds in this Sophoclean drama, what grievous weeping from the soul of man born before Christ! Under the blows of blind destiny, man—the plaything of a merciless fate—wrings his hands, looking heavenward, but the heavens remain silent and motionless. Life crushes the Christian, too; he looks toward heaven, wringing his hands,

but he now knows that the Father of us all has His abode there, who hears every petition.

He hears everything. Does He grant everything, too? Brethren, take care. Is it permissible to turn to God with every kind of request? A human life is full of so many worries and complainings. God's fatherly heart listens to all; then in His wisdom and omniscience He selects the petitions. Those which He sees bring us nearer to our final goal, He grants: even as we asked. Those which He sees imperil our eternal goal, He does not grant as we asked. But not one of our prayers is wasted, not one of the petitions sent to Heaven remains unanswered. But the answer we receive is not the answer we asked for; not as our minds, accustomed to narrow, earthly boundaries, planned, but as our Father, who thinks in millenniums, sees to be best for us in eternity.

All of us can understand that a kingly eagle, hovering in the air at a height of a thousand feet, will see the world, men, and events, quite differently from the hen scratching on a small rubbish-heap.

4) And this wisdom guides not only individuals, but also peoples. It is true, that in this chaotic period we live in, it is especially difficult for the generations of today to see or merely to believe in a concordant, sublime power guarding and guiding the development of the world—divine Providence.

But if we look back a few decades or centuries from the chaos of today, it is impossible not to become aware of the divine thought guiding the course of world history. It is impossible not to see the finger of Providence in the historical fact that, at the fateful turning-points of mankind's development, there always appeared the man or institution needed by mankind at the time, that development might continue.

Thus, when the culture of ancient times became ripe for

annihilation, and it would have meant an irreparable loss had many of its treasures been demolished with it, behold, St. Augustine appeared 1500 years ago and built those ancient treasures into the foundation of a new cultural structure. And the coming of St. Athanasius and St. Cyril in the midst of the embittered doctrinal revolts of the early Christian heretics was no less providential. When the Byzantine emperors would have made the popes their vassals, the formation and strengthening of the temporal power of the papacy was likewise providential. And again, at the height of the temporal power of the papacy, it was equally providential that the mendicant Orders were formed, which took evangelical poverty literally, to counteract the growing spirit of worldliness. It is impossible not to see the guiding hand of Providence in history.

We may recall a later example. At Versailles in 1871 a victorious and powerful German nation dictated terms of peace to a vanquished nation, the French. Less than fifty years passed, and the vanquished French nation dictated terms of peace to the former victors also at Versailles. Less than fifty years. Then shall I dare to stand before the eternal Being and call Him to account? Shall I dare to say: "Why didst Thou not give me, short-lived mortal though I am—even now the tree for my coffin is growing in some forest—why didst Thou not give me this or that, why didst Thou allow this or that to happen, why didst Thou not strike with Thy lightning this or that evil-doer?"

Brethren, we will not question the ways of divine Providence if we remember two great thoughts set down in Holy Writ. The one is St. Paul's immortal, beautiful exclamation: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33.) The second is again in St. Paul's words: "And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good" (Rom. 8:28).

The world is a great theater, in which God is the manager. He gives a rôle to each one, and we do not know what guides Him in these assignments: one plays the part of king; another, the part of beggar—it is all the same. The important thing is how they act. Of course he who has to play the beggar in this life easily starts grumbling. If trouble, suffering, and unhappiness come, we are easily daunted; when the evil-doer flourishes, we promptly become embittered.

This is only because we judge too quickly. While the play is still being acted, we cannot write the criticism of it; we must wait until the curtain descends for the last time, and then judge. The curtain of this world-theater will descend for the last time on judgment day, and the fiery flames of the sinking world will light up these words of Holy Writ: "To them that love God, all things work together unto good." To every suffering brother, then, to each one struggling with some burden, to all who are weary and sad, I can give only this advice: Take the Holy Bible and read the eighth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. "And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good" (8:28). "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who is against us?" (8:31.) "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword?" (8:35.) "Neither death nor life . . . nor things present nor things to come nor might nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God" (8:38, 39).

A transcontinental express-train is rushing across the prairies at a terrific speed. The night is dark and starless. The passengers are quietly sleeping; only the engineer peers before him into the dark night. Of a sudden, a white figure seems to be floating in front of the headlights and making signs to him: "Stop, stop!" Cold shivers run down

his back; but the apparition disappears, and the roaring train rushes on.

After a short interval the apparition appears again. The engineer makes a startled movement toward the brakes. The apparition disappears once more. The train thunders on in the darkness.

But see! The apparition is here for the third time. It waves its white arms affrightedly: Stop, stop! The engineer, hardly able to control his nerves, jams the brake down hard. A clattering, grinding noise, the cars strike against the buffers with terrific force, parcels are thrown to the floor, the passengers start screaming from their sleep. What is it, what has happened?

What had happened? At a certain point the railroad crossed a great bridge, but the bridge had been swept away in the night by the sudden overflowing of the river. And at the edge of the raging waters, a short distance from the river-bank, stands the steaming, panting engine.

And the apparition, which had saved hundreds from being dashed precipitously into the river? A tiny moth had become imprisoned under the glass of the headlight and, as it beat its wings in a vain effort to free itself, in the light of the lamp its shadow had seemed to dance ghost-like in front of the rushing train, and brought it to a halt. In God's hand, even the wing of a moth is a sufficient means for Him to use to save hundreds of human lives.

I believe in a heavenly Father who cares for us. Amen.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

God is our Father. From the lips of the Lord Jesus we heard this wonderful truth, that God is our Father who lovingly cares for His children and directs their destinies. Holy Scripture speaks repeatedly of God providing for His people.

In the Old Testament we find such expressions as these: "But Thy providence, O Father, governeth" (Wis. 14:3). "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God" (Ecclus. 11:14). ¹ made the little and the great, and He hath equally care of all" (Wis. 6:8).

The New Testament gives a still more sublime picture of God, who, "upholding all things by the word of His power," is portrayed as a loving Father who cares for His creatures. (Hcb. 1:3; Col. 1:16.) "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" asked our Lord. "And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father. Fear not therefore; better are you than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:29, 31).

The belief in divine Providence is an exalting doctrine of our holy faith, but apparently many occurrences deny its existence. Many persons there are who rail bitterly against God, who lose their faith when trouble comes into their lives or when they see vice triumphant and honor trampled underfoot. Where is Providence now? they ask bitterly. Where is the gentle care of the heavenly Father?

Therefore I find it necessary for us to contemplate the thought of divine Providence, that we may try to study God's eternal plan by which He guides the world toward its final goal. I think many doubts and many objections

THE GREAT GOD

will be dissipated if we answer these two questions correctly: How should we understand divine Providence? How should we not understand it?

HOW WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND "DIVINE PROVIDENCE"

i) Our first question is, then: What is the meaning of the Scriptural expressions that speak of Providence? This question occupied St. Augustine, too, and today we can give no better answer to it than he gave. (*De gen. ad Utt.*, iv, 12.)

The answer is this: God does not treat the world as an architect treats the house he has built. The finished house stands alone, without any further help from the architect; but the world cannot remain for one moment without the constant sustaining activity of God.

We often see this thought expressed on the canvas of painters: God, portrayed as an aged man, holds the globe in His hand. Of course, such pictures spring from an all too human imagination; God does not hold the world in His hand—He has no hand—but He maintains it in existence by His creative will, He keeps it in being.

What, then, do we understand by Providence? That activity of God by which He guides His creatures toward the goal which He has appointed for them. Understand well, brethren. We are speaking of the goal God has appointed for us; we must reach that, divine Providence guides us to attain that, not such goals as our earthly reasoning, with its limited horizon, devises for us. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Is. 55:8), saith the Lord.

He who thus rightly understands Providence will not doubt it, and he will see its workings in his own life with a humbly grateful heart.

2) Why, this is a pure miracle, people at times exclaim, if they have escaped from some particularly difficult situa-

tion or if some unexpected good fortune has befallen them.

But that is not a pure miracle. There is hardly any adult, looking back on the events of his past life with a mature understanding and a living faith, who could not exclaim: It is a pure miracle how God has guided me during my whole life; when this and that happened in my past, I could not perceive what was the object of it, but now I see clearly what God intended to achieve.

Looking back upon our lives with a riper understanding, we see that Providence brought us into association with people of difficult temperament, that their weaknesses might offer opportunity for the strengthening of our souls. That excessively jovial person, for instance, was sent to work with me that my too serious character should be counterbalanced. That other who criticizes so much was sent to tell me the truth and teach me self-knowledge. And this one, who tempts me to sin? That I might not become conceited, that I might see how far I still am from what I should be. And that exasperating person? That I might practice self-control. And that sly calumniator? That I might learn to forgive more generously. And that cripple? That I might be grateful for my good health. And that saint? That I might be ashamed of myself.

Yes, brethren, we would learn if we could accustom ourselves to see God's envoy in every person with whom life brings us in contact. I go still further—if we could accustom ourselves to ask not only of persons, but of every event, sorrow, trouble: What does God want of me through this? What altar of idolatry must be thrown down in my heart? What disappointment am I to be spared? What sinful inclination must I cast out? What new strength is to be developed within me? If we were to question ourselves thus, we should feel the power of divine Providence with us day by day, and we should be truly faithful Christians, able to kiss the invisible, guiding, holy hand of our heavenly Father with like fervor in happiness and in adversity, and

should be able to pray sincerely with the great Pascal: "Lord, Thou art none the less God when Thou triest and punishest than when Thou consolest and art merciful."

3) Miraculous are the ways of the Lord. Sometimes we feel that our whole life is helplessly tangled, and the oppressive feeling of desertion suffocates us. Everyone is against us, everything seems to conspire against us. Well is it for us if at such a time we can pray: I believe in the Father Almighty. God, who guides the millions of stars according to plans that are far beyond human understanding, surely has a plan for me, even though I do not see it. I do not see it now, but sometime I shall see it.

Miraculous are the ways of the Lord. When we are being swept along by the current of daily happenings, the guiding hand of God easily becomes dimmer to our sight; but years later, perhaps when we are growing gray, we perceive it. How singularly Providence, God our Father, led us!

I will give only one quite recent example of this. At the time of the Russian revolution a teacher of crystallography, Artemieff by name, was in the faculty of the University of Moscow. Before that, he had been an assistant professor at St. Petersburg, then professor at the Polytechnic School at Warsaw, and finally University professor at Moscow. During the revolution he lost his whole fortune, and fled to a foreign country.

Can we imagine the state of mind of that man, who had lost an honored position, fortune, and fatherland? Must he not have complained bitterly? Must he not have fallen into despair?

That happened in 1917. Twelve years later, in Vienna, an elderly man prostrated himself on the steps of the altar before the ordaining bishop, to receive Holy Orders. It was Artemieff, former professor at the University of Moscow, whose homelessness drove him first to Berlin, then to Vienna, where he became well acquainted with our holy

religion. Had he remained in Russia, surrounded only by members of the Greek Orthodox Church, perhaps this would not have happened. After a long spiritual development, he became a Catholic in 1924 and was ordained five years later. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord! "For My thoughts are not your thoughts."

II

HOW WE SHOULD NOT UNDERSTAND "PROVIDENCE"

1) I have not yet quoted the most beautiful of Christ's words in which He proclaims divine Providence. I want to quote them here and now, for they are not only most beautiful words, but they are the words to which the most exceptions are taken.

The man of today stares uncomprehendingly when he hears such words from the Lord Jesus' lips: "Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. . . . Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they? . . . And for raiment why are you solicitous? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. . . . And if the grass of the field, which is to-day and tomorrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe: how much more you, O ye of little faith? . . . Your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:25-33).

I repeat, when the man of today hears such things, he first of all stares uncomprehendingly. Why, where are we? he exclaims. In the romanticism of the stars? In the solitude of the desert? In Canaan, flowing with milk and honey, where golden apples and grapes hang from the trees? Are we not living among smoking factory-chimneys? Are we not starving on the top floors of monstrous lodging-houses?

Arc we not living among millions of people whose one thought, problem, anxiety, question is: What shall we eat? how shall we pay our rent? with what shall we clothe ourselves? And now the Gospel says: Do not think about all these things.

But come, brethren. Does it say that? Of course not. Our Lord Christ wants us merely to do our part, and then trust the rest to God. Certainly we should work to improve our circumstances, but trusting with childlike faith in divine Providence. For, if this is not burning within us, then our love of work will lessen, and our spirits will become gloomy from constant anxiety.

2) Then is our Lord Jesus Christ not an enemy of pain-taking labor? Decidedly not. No one can think that the continually active and busy Lord Jesus advises idleness or waiting until good fortune falls into one's lap, or that He proclaims the Mohammedan creed: "What will be, will be." Not at all. Our Lord does not object to our working hard for a livelihood, but to our lack of faith and trust in God. He does not admonish us against providing for the future, but only exhorts us not to be continually anxious about it.

It is as though He said: I am displeased, not if you labor and make provision for the future, but if worldly cares engross all your attention. Did I not include this petition in My prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread"? Does My Apostle not write: "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (I Tim. 5:8)? And is it not written in the Ten Commandments, that children shall help their parents? Make provision for yourselves, but do not become slaves to anxiety. The lilies have no silk-factories, have taken no lessons in designing, they have no sewing machines, and yet could any silk-merchant's dazzling shop window compete with even one white lily petal? Then can the Father forget you?

Strive, but trust, too. Work, but trust, too. Belief in Providence does not stifle man's ambition to work. God gave manna to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, He provided for them, but they had to gather it up. He gave fish in the disciples' nets, He provided for them, but they had to lift the nets into the boat. He gave St. Paul marvelous apostolic success, but how much the Apostle had to bear, to labor, and to suffer! God gives every little bird its daily food, but He does not place the food in its nest. The bird also has to work for it. Do we believe that the fishes leap in the water and the birds dart hither and thither in the air for our amusement? O no. They are seeking food, they are working. This is how we must not understand the belief in Providence. By no means does it signify that we have no need to work. It does not mean that we can fold our hands in our laps, and wait for blessings to be showered upon us.

3) I go still further and assert that the thought of a God who provides for us, the thought of a God who by His constant concurrence maintains the world, not only does not take away our love of work, but directly makes it our duty to work and to be continually active.

"My Father worketh until now" (John 5:17)- If these words are true—and they proceed from the Lord Jesus' lips—then it is the duty of every man to work, for man is God's likeness.

How the thought of an active God ennoble work, which some call the curse of humanity! Whence is work? Whence the ceaseless, restless, feverish activity of man? Why must man work, work sorely by the sweat of his brow? O yes, these are hard questions, and they are not answered by the philosophy of atheism.

Why must man work? And work so grievously? The flowers bloom and flourish; they do not work. The lilies are gorgeous in their white raiment, and they neither spin nor weave. The birds find enough for their needs, and are

not obliged to stand among whirring machines, or to labor in the depths of some mine; they sing, soar, live, and are happy. Only man must work by the sweat of his brow. Only his hands are cracked and roughened by tools. Only man's back is bent by tilling the soil. Only man's lungs are wasted away above dusty documents. Only from the face of man does the joy of life disappear.

Why is this, why? Why must man work? And here we have the sublime answer: Man shows by his ceaseless activity that he is the likeness of the ceaselessly active God. Ever since God took the first man and "put him into the paradise of pleasure to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15), ever since then work has been a duty laid upon us. But if we know that with this working we are like the continually active God, then work becomes a glorious honor for us, and our exalting human privilege.

Work, in the opinion of a Christian, is a divine honor. In the Old Testament it is written: "Hast thou seen a man swift in his work? He shall stand before kings and shall not be before those that are obscure" (Prov. 22:29).

The sweat of labor still remains salty, it is true; the cracked and roughened hand still remains hard, but the word of the Lord sounds encouragingly in the laborer's ear: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21).

I now ask: Does belief in Providence make for idleness? We read St. Paul's words, addressed to some idle, do-nothing Thessalonian Christians: "For we have heard there are some among you who walk disorderly, working not at all, but curiously meddling. Now we charge them that are such, and beseech them by the Lord Jesus Christ, that, working with silence, they would eat their own bread" (II Thess. 3:11).

There is work which is the work of slaves: this is the



drudgery of generations which do not know God. And there is work which is divine service: and this is the work of a Christian. If we work in accordance with God's will, then our desk becomes an altar, the kitchen-range an altar, the washboard an altar, the sewing machine an altar, and the typewriter, too; and hard, tiring, laborious work becomes divine service. Brethren, do not let us deceive ourselves. God does not ask of us merely half an hour on Sundays. He asks for our week days as well. We must praise God not only with hands clasped in prayer, but with hands which hold the tool, the pen, and the brush. Not only with prayer must we praise Him, but with labor, too. He Himself wishes this when He says: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul."

If we trust in the Father who cares for us, then shall we not work? Of course we must work. Our caution in providing for the future, the work by which we gain our daily bread, our planning and reckoning, all these are instruments for divine Providence. Providence is not the same as idleness. Providence is not the same as sitting with our hands in our lap. Providence does not mean waiting for roast pigeons to fly into our mouth. But Providence does mean doing everything in our power to obtain a livelihood; it does mean taking every precaution not to catch cold; it does mean learning every lesson to the best of our ability; it does mean planning, computing, originating, undertaking, and being skilful. But during all these and afterwards we should pray: "Lord, I have done everything in my power; now I humbly beg that Thou mayest be with me, Thy faithful child." Yes, this is the way to explain Providence aright.

Dear brethren, one of the most touching figures in the Old Testament narratives is the elder Tobias. We cannot read the account of his life without being deeply affected. How he labors and toils, what sacrifices he makes, even to risking his own life, for the sake of his fellow-men! And

what is his reward apparently? It is as though God had forsaken him. In the midst of his generous work for others, calamity falls upon him: he is stricken with blindness. And now comes the great praise of him in Holy Writ. In his misfortune he did not turn away from God, "but continued immovable in the fear of God" (Tob. 2:14).

He remained strong and steadfast even in trouble, for he had faith in God although he could then only say: "I believe in one God." And we can now add: "in the Father Almighty."

I believe in the heavenly Father. It is my unalterable conviction that God's fatherly, guiding hand is directing the marvelous machinery of the universe.

I believe in the Father who cares for His creatures. It is my sacred conviction that human life is not a purposeless comedy, the grave not the final station, decay not the final form; but in the other home a Father awaits me, a Father who said that He is not a God of the dead, but of the living.

I believe, my God, that Thou art my Father who cares for me. If Thou dost not help, everything comes to a standstill. If Thou dost not help, the heart ceases to beat. If Thou dost not help, the birds cease to fly. If Thou dost not help, the rushing river ceases to flow. If Thou dost not help, not an insect can move, not a leaf quiver.

If Thou dost not help. But Thou dost help me, for Thou art my Father. Amen.

IV

THE WORSHIP OF GOD

If God is our Father, we have nothing to fear; He certainly provides for us. If God is our Father, that implies much more than that we trust in Him; humbly and reverently we must address ourselves to Him.

If God is our Father, it is only natural that we converse with Him, that is, that we pray to Him. Does a father love that child who does not speak to him for weeks at a time? Likewise, will the heavenly Father love that person who does not speak to Him in prayer?

Someone may say: "That is such an earthly, human way of thinking, to suppose that God, the great and eternal God, needs our prayers, that He expects us to pray."

To this I would reply in the words of our Lord when He said to the Samaritan woman: "The hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to adore Him" (John 4:23). Do you hear? The Father certainly seeks those who worship Him.

The pages of the New Testament bear witness continually to the fact that our Lord Himself often set an example by praying. At one time He prays in solitude, at another time in the presence of His disciples, then again before a whole multitude. He prayed when He took leave of this world, when He fought His death-struggle, when His soul rejoiced, and when tears filled His eyes.

The Apostles followed His example. It is striking in their writings how often they exhort the first believers to pray and how often they mention our Lord's fervent

prayers. (Acts 1:24; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4; 8:15; I Thess. 1:2; Ephes. 1:17; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; Rom. 12:12; I Cor. 7:5; II Cor. 1:11.) Yes, if God is our Father, we must worship Him. Why should we pray, and how should we pray? I shall endeavor to answer these two questions.

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

Our first question, then, is: Why should we pray?

1) To be able to answer this question, we must first be quite clear as to what prayer is. One who correctly understands the essence of prayer, never needs to be urged, still less commanded, to pray: such a one will joyously seek every opportunity of praying.

What is prayer?

0) To pray means to converse with God, that is, to turn to Him whole-heartedly in our thoughts and our feelings. Prayer strikes every chord within us. A person who prays devoutly, feels how time and eternity, heaven and earth, fuse into one within him. He feels that he is now standing before the face of God, pouring out his joys and sorrows to Him. It is a sublime moment, that of prayer. Therefore the most beautiful sight in the world is the sight of a man at prayer. "Do not disturb him; he is praying now."

Emperor Charles V was one time attending holy mass, when he was informed that the ambassador of a foreign power had arrived and begged to be received immediately. The Emperor sent this message: "Tell the ambassador that I myself am now being received."

b) The blessed democracy of prayer! Only notice, brethren, how every face becomes uniform in prayer. Whatever position is held in society, be the person learned or ignorant, adult or child, servant or king, while praying

everyone becomes equal—a humble, weak individual. For everyone becomes humble who experiences in prayer the greatness of God, but those become strong also who know how to hold fast in prayer to the mighty arm of God.

This earthly life is the flat life of the valleys; faith placed in God becomes the lofty height of the mountain top. From this height fresh life-giving waters flow into the valley and make the earth fruitful; on the heights of faith in God a spring gushes forth; without its life-giving water everything in this flat earthly life would become parched and dry. Do you know what this spring is? It is prayer.

2) If we know this, then we know how to answer the question mentioned in the beginning: "Why should we pray? Does God, the great and eternal God, need the prayers of weak little human beings?" Do you know what the answer is?

True, God does not need our prayers. But still we must pray, for we have need of God.

d) Men may speak of God often, read of Him, syllogize and affirm, but the only ones that will feel God are those who send words of joy, of gratitude, of repentance, of supplication, and of praise to Him in eternity; in a word, those who pray. This cannot be explained, it must be put to the test. Then it will be proved how prayer elevates the soul, how it strengthens the will, purifies, gives patience and—harken well!—how it quiets the nerves, the modern man's feverishly strained nerves. Do not be shocked if I say: The effect of heartfelt evening prayer on our nerves is equal to that of a dose of veronal.

If a surgeon before an operation, a judge before giving his verdict in some complicated lawsuit, or the head of a family before deciding some difficult domestic problem would but lift his soul in prayer for a moment—"Tord God, be Thou with me; help me to do what is best"—he would find he had discovered his true strength, know what

incomprehensible and inexplicable new sources of power had been opened up within him consequent upon his turning Godward.

Turning Godward, asking God's advice. How often we feel helpless amid the complex problems of life today! At such times we rush about, plan, write letters, telephone, ask advice from every side, and at last are more confused than ever. But those who believe in God, ask, first and last, advice from Him.

Someone has said (and he saw the situation aright): "The man of today has very many enjoyments and very little happiness." In places of amusement, enjoyment is served to him at high prices, but calming, strengthening, edifying happiness is not found there.

Were he to know the joys of prayer! Prayer is quietude, silence, and rest. What great blessings these are now! Our overwrought nerves are calmed and our tired souls are refreshed by the quietude of prayer. In the solitude of our rooms, in the peace of the churches—on the stilly heights of the mountains, in the forests, anywhere—only let quietude reign. Therefore we can pray best in the morning when the events of the day have not yet disturbed our souls, and in the evening, when we have no need to trouble ourselves any more with the day that is over. How beneficial it is for us, and how grateful we should be that our holy religion urges daily prayer, which means that it assures us a few quiet minutes every day. Because soon we shall not have even a minute for ourselves: all our time belongs to the office, to bread-winning, to our cares, to hustling, to amusement. We have become poorer than our machines; those at least rest at night, but our worries often keep us from sleep. But now comes prayer and says to us: At last you belong to yourself, to your soul, to God. How grateful we must be that we may pray.

b) Here I must draw attention to a splendid trait of Christianity: the love of prayer. Yes, we Christians are a

generation continually praying. Nowhere in the world does one pray with such fervor and so frequently as in the Christian religion.

No one can pray so fervently as we can; because we believe not only that God is the supremely powerful Creator of the world, but also that He is our heavenly Father, lovingly directing the course of the world and the life of every single individual. As Creator, He is able to help; as Father, He is willing to help.

Perhaps you will say: But followers of other religions also pray. Certainly, but not as Christians do, not with such fervor, not with such faith, not filled with such touching piety. For only we unite in God the two apparently incompatible ideas: Creator and Father. Before the infinitely mighty Creator, we humble ourselves even to the dust; but, as He is also Father, we dare to approach Him, to lean on His heart, we converse with Him. We converse with Him as we should not dare to converse with those set in authority over us—everyone talks confidently to God, even the tiny child and the unlettered aged woman.

But I go still further and maintain that Christianity is the religion of prayer also because nowhere does one pray so much as among us.

Long ago in Christian families the first words learned by a little child beginning to talk were the words "God" and "Jesus." The first lesson that child had to learn with his reason was not a birthday greeting, but a little prayer in verse. How often the question falls from careful mother-lips: "My son, have you said your prayers?" And when the child is going away from home, the last motherly word is again: "Now, don't forget to say your prayers."

Nobody in the world feels the sublimity of God so intensely as does the Christian religion. Therefore it naturally wishes that the homage paid to God and the worship of God should not cease even for a moment on this earth.

The practice of morning and night prayers is a reverent

and beautiful custom of Christians. What an uplifting thought it is that there is no moment of time when people are not kneeling in prayer to God; for there is always some part of the world where dawn is just breaking, or where night is falling.

But the Catholic Church goes even further in her worship of God. She well knows that because of their heavy earthly cares her secular members cannot very well find time during the day for prayer. Therefore she has laid a very strict obligation on her priests, that they should, under whatever circumstances, find at least one hour a day in which to worship God. This is the obligatory clerical prayer, the Breviary. These priests reading their Breviaries, this disposition of the Church, afford us a little deeper idea of God's sublimity. The Breviary is not a private prayer of the priest, but the Church's official hymn of praise, which is continuously rising from all parts of the world to the heavenly Father.

Truly, from all parts of the world. One who travels much and takes notice of all he sees with the sensitiveness of a Christian soul, must, I think, be the richer by a spiritual experience, when he meets on all sides the official representatives of the Catholic Church who are praising God without ceasing—the priests reading their Breviaries; in trains, on the decks of great liners, in monastic flower-gardens, everywhere, the priest is reading his Breviary. How magnificently holy Church knows the way to pray!

Truly, unceasing prayer resounds like some festive music throughout the whole history of Christianity: in the depths of the catacombs, beneath the vaulted roofs of cathedrals, in royal palaces, in the hovels of the poor, amid the thunder of cannons and the noise of everyday life, at the sick bed, and at the altar adorned for a wedding, in the confessional, how many prayers are offered up! Only God Almighty knows how many prayers rise

daily from the depths of millions of suffering or joyous human hearts.

This is rightly so, dear brethren. So it beseems us, who confess: "I believe in God, in our blessed, infinitely good Father."

II

HOW WE SHOULD PRAY

i) In these days it has become customary to learn foreign languages. Everywhere courses of instruction are being arranged; very many learn at least one foreign language, for this is a great convenience in worldly intercourse.

Intercourse with the next world has its official language, too, the language of prayer. The Lord God understands every human language, but He hears only one, the language of prayer.

Many are at the greatest pains to learn German, French, Italian, Spanish. If only they would spend as much time in acquiring the language of the other world, too! For that must also be learned and practiced.

Learned? From whom? Who is the best teacher of the language of the world to come? Do not be surprised if I say, the beggar and the child.

The beggar. Why do we pray? Because we are poor, and God is rich; we are weak, and God is mighty. He who is most sensible of his poverty, of his own unworthiness in God's sight, will pray so much the better: so much the more humbly, so much more fervently, so much more perseveringly.

Well, and the child? The child knows how to express his feelings even without words, with a gesture only, with a movement, with a single smile. A little child speaks long before he knows how to use words; he speaks with his

glance, with the smile he bestows upon his mother. How warm, how touching is such speech without words, and the prayer without words, too!

The curé of Ars noticed that one of his simple parishioners remained motionless for hours in front of the tabernacle. "What are you doing at such a time?" the priest asked him. "I look at Jesus, Jesus looks at me." What grand, devout, pious, childlike words! Yes, one can pray, too, without words, for a long time, motionlessly, by looking at the Eucharist, at the Crucifix, with reverent love.

2) That I may, after all, give a few directions how to pray well, I should like to mention these three ideas: We worship God who is above us, we worship God who is among us, and we worship God who is within us.

a) We worship God who is above us. It is a peculiarity of human speech, that we say those are "above" us, of whom we think with respect. To be "above" signifies that the person in question is considered to be in a higher position than we ourselves are. The student sees in his teacher the authority of the professorial rostrum, we respect in the judge, who is enforcing the laws of his country, the authority of the law courts, and in the monarch the eminence of the throne. It is quite natural, therefore, that when we think of God, the highest authority, our eyes involuntarily turn heavenward; the priest celebrating mass lifts his hands also toward heaven. Besides, we learnt this from the Lord Jesus, who Himself prayed more than once in this manner. (Cf. Mark 6:41; 7:34.)

Do we thus deny our belief that God is everywhere present? Not at all. With that gesture we desire only to help our souls break away from earthly cares during prayer, to rise above every created object, above mountains, valleys, forests, seas, above the millions of speeding stars, and, as though soaring beyond the things of earth (as far as is possible in this corporeal life), to worship in

humility the one true God, who is above the whole of His creation.

We may sit down at our radio and try to tune in some station. We try, but no sound is heard. What can be the matter? The tubes are lighted, the loud-speaker is in order, the wires are intact; and still it does not work. At last we remember: why, of course, the antenna is connected to the ground. Likewise the prayer of a soul thus connected is soundless; the prayer conceived in a heart bound to this earth does not find a heavenly echo. The antenna must be disconnected from the earth, then music will be heard; and I must lift my soul away from earth, then heaven will re-echo to my prayer. This is to worship God, who is above us.

b) Then we worship God, who is among us. God is among us? Why, just a moment ago we said He is above us, above all His creation. That is true. But it is no less true that God is also among us. We know how the Gospel of St. John begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God" (John 1:1). "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1.14), that is, the word of God, the Son of God became a living body and came among us, and when He returned to His heavenly Father, even then He did not altogether leave us, but remained here among us, on our altars, in the Most Blessed Eucharist.

"Down in adoration falling,
Lo, the sacred Host we hail;
Lo, o'er ancient forms departing,
Newer rites of grace prevail."

c) Lastly, we worship God, who is within us. How shall we understand this? God lives within us? Can we believe that? Now, if man were to say it, we would not believe it. But we must believe the words of our Lord Christ. "If anyone love Me," He said, "he will keep My word, and

My Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). Are these not plain words? He who loves God and keeps His commandments, in the soul of such a one God dwells. What a superb revelation! Such a man is God's living temple, a living tabernacle.

And I can worship God, not only in words, but in my life, too. Yes, the most beautiful worship of Him is a life lived according to His commandments. Therefore when I say that we worship the God who dwells within us in our lives, I only repeat St. Paul's words: "Glorify and bear God in your body" (I Cor. 6:20). There are composers who have chosen interesting titles for some of their pieces: for example, "Song without Words." Such a song of praise and prayer to God is a life lived in accordance with His will.

In the light of this thought we see clearly what a beneficial custom it is, that devout Christians do not permit a great festival to pass without going to confession and communion. Truly this is the most profound and most beautiful celebration: to make provision that, should the dust of life cover our souls, and our human weakness become the victim of temptation's power, at least the merciful and forgiving God may come in to us again and again. Brethren, we worship God, who is within us.

An old fisherman took a young man as passenger in his boat. On one of the oars was written the word "Pray." On the other oar, the word "Work." The youth said mockingly: "You're out of date, Uncle. What does anybody want with prayer, if he works?"

The old man said nothing: but he let go the oar on which "pray" was written, and rowed with the other. He rowed and rowed; but they only turned round and round, and made no progress. The young man then understood that, besides the oar of "Work," we need also the other, that of "Prayer."

Therefore we worship God who is above us, in our regular morning and night prayer; we worship God who is among us, in our church devotions; and we worship God who is within us, by our life ordered according to His will. There is no need to enjoin us, under various penalties, to go to mass, to confession, and communion. There is no need to command us to pray.

It is our joy and strength that we possess a heavenly Father; it is our consolation that God listens to us: it is our greatest honor that we are allowed to pray. Amen.

V

THE LOVE OF GOD

THE more deeply we immerse ourselves in the thought that God is our Father, the more warmly do our hearts turn to our loving God.

God is our Father, therefore He cares for us, and we trust in Him. God is our Father, therefore we worship Him.

Today we ascend still higher and lay the very warmest colors on the picture of the heavenly Father. We Christians not only fear God, we not only worship Him and bow humbly before Him, but we also stand in such a relation to Him as is not held by the followers of any other religion: we love God. We love Him with a wonderfully fine childlike simplicity and unsurpassed tenderness. We love Him, for He is our heavenly Father.

The heathens possessed idols, and the poor creatures dared only to look upon their idols in fear and trembling. The people of the Old Testament knew the true God, but in their prayers a note of fear was constantly heard. We Christians, however, do not look up to God in fear and trembling, but in love, boundless love.

How did we discover that we must love God? I shall answer this question in the first part of today's sermon. Following that, we will determine how we can show our love for God. Briefly, then, I would sum up the subject of my sermon today in the two questions; Why do we love God and how shall we love Him?

WHY DO WE LOVE GOD?

i) To the question, why we love God, my first answer might be: We love Him, because He commands us to do so.

The Pharisees explained the law of the Old Testament with great show of earnestness and much craftiness. They decided upon three hundred prohibitions and more than two hundred commandments, so it is no wonder that the people did not know what to make of all this, did not know which was the most important commandment.

On one occasion they asked the Master: "Which is the first commandment of all?" His reply surprised them. From this host of directions, commands, interdictions, He puts as first, that which hardly anyone had thought of, which had lain buried, as it were: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind" (Matt. 22:37).

It is worth while considering this reply a little. Who understands man best of all? He who created him, the Lord God. It is interesting that God the Creator placed in the center of the human body not the brain, but the heart, as though to indicate thereby that the bigger rôle in man is to be played by the heart, not the brain. And truly the Lord Jesus names, as the first, and most important commandment, the commandment of the heart, love.

Which is the first commandment of all? they asked our Lord. And what did He reply? That you should understand God with all your powers of reasoning? No. Then how? Love God with your whole heart. What a sign of fatherly benignity on God's part is this commandment which directs that we should love Him!

God's love is the source of our very greatest joy and happiness, an honor shown us, and our source of strength.

That would have been an unsurpassed favor to us, if God had allowed us to love Him. But God went still further. Even as He saw that His love is a vital necessity for us, He not only allowed, but directly commanded this: Love the Lord thy God. Therefore we love God because He has commanded us to do so.

2) But if I consider further why we love God, then I might say: We love God because He is so beautiful.

God is beautiful? But how do I know this? I have never seen God. True, I have not seen God, I have seen only traces of His hand: I see this gorgeously colorful world and am dazzled.

Brother, do you love the flowers, the fragrant sweet-smelling meadows, the fields of rippling wheat? Do you love the hurrying mountain-streams, the whispering woods, the snow-covered hills, the murmuring sea?

Those who travel in the neighborhood of Lake Lucerne must not neglect making the journey up the Rigi, that they may witness the most splendid sunrise. It is early daybreak; in the pale dawn stupendous glaciers are dimly visible. It grows brighter . . . ever brighter; suddenly the sun emerges and the peaks scintillate like flaming torches, the sea of snow and ice-fields is reddened as if by fire, and in the stillly silence someone near us sighs deeply: "O God, O great God!"

How much beauty there is in this world! But whence does it come? Of itself? It has always been. Is that an answer to the question? How beautiful must God be if His shadow, this created world, is so glorious! Then I might say, I love God because He is so beautiful.

3) But I must give a more profound answer than that. First, I love God, not because He is beautiful, but because He is good, infinitely good.

a) The Lord Jesus once said: "None is good but God alone" (Luke 18:19). Is this not an exaggeration? Is there no goodness also among men? Of how many we

say: "He is a good man." We even say: "This man is goodness itself."

Brethren, who would deny that there is goodness also among us? Who would deny that people have inherent good qualities? But I would not dare to say of anyone that he is wholly good, that he is goodness itself. Let him have been St. Peter or St. Paul, priest, pope, whatever you like; he was a man, and man is a mixture of good and evil. That evil shall not become paramount in us, this is what each one of us must strive for continually. Many have succeeded in winning a complete victory, but there was the possibility that evil would overcome the good in them. So we cannot truly call any man wholly good. "None is good but God alone." He is the source of all good, for His essence is goodness. In man there is also a little portion of goodness, but he receives it from the source, from God, as the planets receive their light from the source of light, from the sun.

In the book of the prophet Isaias, the Lord God uses a striking comparison when wishing to make His goodness toward His people appreciable. "Behold, I have graven thee in My hands" (Is. 49:16), says the Lord. We use our hands more frequently than we do any other of our members; they are continually before our eyes; so then "to engrave something in our hands" signifies that we remember something constantly, think of it constantly. How good that God must be who promises to think of us constantly!

That God is so good to us and loves us so much is consequent on His nature. Goodness cannot be withheld, it flows in every direction. Can the blazing fire withhold the warmth it diffuses? Can the sun withhold its rays and refrain from enveloping everything around it in light? But what the fire and sun are constrained to do, God does of His own free will, when He pours forth His goodness in all directions.

b) But where does God show His goodness? Where? First, He showed it when He called this whole world into being. Let us but look around us with observant eyes in this colorful world. How everything here proclaims the goodness of the Creator! The Lord Jesus Himself called our attention to this, telling us to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. Listen to the murmuring brook and hold speech with the whispering breeze. All sing: How good is God! "Who giveth to beasts their food: and to the young ravens that call upon Him" (Ps. 146:9), says the Psalmist.

To this, someone may reply: The old ravens give them food. Well, of course, the old ravens. But whence, from whom is that instinct in them, that they feed their young?

Yes, God is good to the whole world. But He shows His goodness to man still more by loving us without any selfish motive, by loving us without any merit on our part, by loving us without measure.

He loves us without any selfish motive. In this world, either some interest or duty or a blood-tie is mingled in every love, even in parental or filial love. We love someone because he was good to us, because he helped us, or because he gained our affection, or because we had need of him. But God loves without any selfish interest. He has no need of us, we cannot make Him happier; and still He says: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3).

Secondly, He loves us without any merit on our part. Who can say he has deserved God's goodness, His love? The angels? Perhaps they can say so. The saints? Perhaps they can say so. But can we say so? All the errors of our life until now come to mind, and we cry with the Psalmist: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:5.) All the sins of our life until now come to our memory, and we cry with the prophet Jeremiah: "The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22). We

call to mind all our sins, and say with St. Paul: "But God commendeth His charity toward us; because when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, 9). God loves us without our deserving His love.

God loves us without measure. There would be no end to the list were I to enumerate the many ways in which God has shown His love for us. He loves us when He gives us parents to care for us, and also understanding friends. He loves us when He gives us bodily soundness and health. He loves us when He blesses us with intellectual ability. Of all this I do not intend to speak today. I emphasize only one thought: How greatly the heavenly Father loved me when He sent our Lord Christ, "who loved me and delivered Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

When, in his love for God, Abraham was ready to make the greatest sacrifice, to sacrifice his son, the angel held back his sword and spoke thus: Now God has known how much you love Him, now when you were ready to sacrifice your greatest treasure, your son, to Him. We also now know, on Good Friday at noon we know, how greatly God loves us, that He gave His dearest treasure, His only-begotten Son, for our sakes. "To redeem the servant Thou gavest Thy Son unto death," says St. Augustine. Then, brethren, with St. John I beg you: Let us love God, "because He hath first loved us" (I John 4:10). He has loved us without any selfish interest, without our deserving, without measure.

Let us love God. But how shall we love Him?

II

HOW SHALL WE LOVE GOD?

According to our blessed Lord, the chief duty of man is to love God. Then, if this is such a vitally important duty of ours, we should like to know if this right love of

God is within us. Is there any external evidence, any sign, that we love God? For example: if our heart begins to beat violently when we think of God, if we become tender-hearted, if a flood of joyous warmth rises to our cheeks, if we break forth into sentimental words during prayer, are these proofs positive of our love for God?

How many complain: "I do not know what is the matter with me. Such happy warmth used to fill my heart when I prayed. Now I do not feel that way at all. I wonder if I have ceased to love God? Oh, nothing of the kind. The warmest sentiment is no certain sign that you love God aright. We can be profuse in words, enthuse, and feel sentimental concerning God; and still it is not certain that we love Him. Some are incapable of such tender moods, yet in them the blessing of love toward God may burn brightly.

On one occasion St. Paul admonished the Roman Christians to cry out as children: "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15), and in that encouragement lies the answer to the question: How shall we love God? Even as a child loves its father, with just such grateful and blessed love. It does not matter whether you are a boy or a girl, old or young. In God's sight the centenarian is a child, and the mighty king is, too.

Shall I tell you what is a certain sign of love toward God? It is the amount of our gratitude to God, and how many sacrifices we are ready to offer for His sake. The amount of sacrifices we are willing to make for God, and for our neighbor for His sake: this is the sum total of our love for God. Then let us love God with a grateful heart and with self-sacrificing love.

1) Love God with a grateful heart.

"Good God!" How often people say this in vain, without thinking and without cause! If they would only think what they are saying. Because if anyone says, "Good

God," then let him also say: "I am in duty bound to be grateful and to love Him for his goodness."

Do you know how a disciple of St. Francis of Assisi once brought this home to a certain frivolous, light-minded person? He took him to a blind, paralyzed man, and said to the afflicted one: "Tell me; if someone were to give you back your sight and your power of movement, would you love that person?"

"Love him?" cried the blind man; "I would be his slave for life."

Then the disciple, turning to the frivolous man, said: "Someone gave you sound senses, and so much more that is good besides. What do you do in gratitude to Him?"

2) Let us love God with self-sacrificing love. The Apocalypse speaks of those who wear the name of the Father on their foreheads (14:1). How often in our lives we have made the sign of the cross! In so doing we have written the Father's name on our forehead each time. We should not let this remain an empty ceremony. With it let us dedicate to the Father all that is behind our forehead, our every thought.

God is our Father; if He is our Father, we endeavor to please Him. In what way? By being obedient to Him and keeping His commandments. "But sometimes that is so difficult; sometimes it touches us to the quick." That makes no difference. It is not easy for a small child to carry out its parents commands; yet they require the child to do so. The immature mind does not understand, and the child is for that reason often angry, cries, and becomes exasperated if its parents forbid something in the child's own interest. Had it more sense, it would say: They are my mother and my father, and if they refuse me something, they surely know best why they do not give; they certainly want what is best for me. Yes, the child would think in this manner if it had more sense. We

adults should think in this way, too, when God refuses some request, or expects some sacrifice of us.

Do not be astonished if I here dilate upon the little things of everyday life and say: One who truly loves God will obey His commandments not less conscientiously than, let us say, the dictates of fashion. In this regard, what remarkable examples are seen in the past and the present!

In the rococo period, on the evening before some great festivity, an artistic hairdresser would arrange the hair of some fashionable women into veritable towers, and these ladies would then stay awake the whole night, sitting motionless in armchairs to prevent a particle of the elaborate edifices from being disturbed. Where does God impose such painful vigils? The same ladies, on the pretext of headache, very easily excused themselves for not going to mass on Sunday. Again, where do we find such a rigid command to abstain from food even in Lent, which is as strict as the rules laid down for those who wish to "reduce"? The persons who consider the restrictions imposed by the Church during Lent as too severe, these same persons, should fashion require it, will eat chalk mixed in vinegar, only that they may acquire slimmer figures. Do these people love God? No. For only those really love Him, who are capable of loving Him with self-sacrifice.

We must love God, and also our neighbor. Here is the other distinctive mark of right love for God, the love of our neighbor. If we love God, if we love God well, then we love our neighbor well, too, and we restore to that beautiful human verb, "to love," its lost significance. Do you know why it is difficult to speak to people of today of the love of God? Because every kind of love has perished within them.

"To love." In the hard-hearted and frivolous attitude of these times, this holy word has fallen into forgetfulness

or what is still more grievous, a venomous meaning has been foisted upon it.

It has fallen into forgetfulness. The rush and hurry of life has trampled upon it. Today whoever is poor must starve, whoever is weak must perish; whoever is ill is a burden in the house, whoever has been crippled by his work must stand aside, whoever dies is forgotten tomorrow. Love has perished.

Or, if its name lives, a venomous poison lurks under it. Its name still lives on the movie-posters, in the titles of plays; in novels it shouts continually and does not allow our youth to remain chaste and unspoilt for long. Today a quagmire of instinctive cravings disguises that beautiful old word "love."

Then how shall that man love God, whom he does not see, when he does not love his fellow-men, whom he sees? Would you speak to him of the love of God? Then speak to the blind of the spring sunshine. Then speak to the dying of the joy of life. Then speak to the paralyzed of a journey round the world. Then make tropical flowers blossom at the North Pole. Man is distrustful, suspicious, bitter, and complaining toward his fellow-creatures, and just as distrustful, suspicious, and reserved toward God.

Whoever is merciless, heartless, wrangling, sulky, and insufferable toward his fellow-men cannot love God. Again, the man in whom the right love of God exists, cannot hide this within himself; it glows gently upon his neighbor also, even as the sun shines upon the moon, and the moon cannot hide this within herself, but the soft brilliance received from the sun she reflects upon the earth and its inhabitants stumbling in darkness.

Do you want to know whether you love God? Then examine yourself, fulfil the words of Holy Writ: "If God hath so loved us; we also ought to love one another. . . . If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us" (I John 4:11, 12).

Dear brethren, the world-famous poet of Christianity, Dante, concluded his great trilogy with these words: "Divine Love moves the sun and all the other stars." Well, if Love directs the lifeless sun and the stars, how much more surely does it direct us, warm-hearted, living men! Therefore we love God, and we would love Him even if He did not command us to do so. We love God, and we would love Him even if He were not so beautiful. We love God because He is so good, and His love benefits us; it ennobles, uplifts, and strengthens us. "If you love the dust," writes St. Augustine (*In I Ioan.*, 2:15; tr. 2, 14), "you will become dust. If you love God, you will become like unto God."

We love God, and just because we love Him we do not look up grumblingly, complainingly, bitterly to Him. We do not say ill-humoredly: If we must go to mass on Sundays, if we must fast on Fridays, if we must go to confession once a year, well, it must be. Oh, not in this manner. But with all our heart, all our thoughts, with all our hopes and longings we turn fervently to Him and say: "Lord God, we are happy that we are allowed to love Thee, happy that we may call ourselves Thine."

In these days, those pitiable people in whom religious faith has weakened, endeavor to satisfy their souls' instinctive search for God in the hazy and dim byways of occultism. One such occult system proclaims to its followers that there are mysterious, unknown organs in the human body by which to recognize the metaphysical world—so-called "lotus flowers." Whoever can develop these in himself, will perceive such things and hear such melodies as cannot be apprehended by eye and ear. All that is a vain daydream, a hopeless longing.

The true sacred flower which lives in our souls is the flower of faith. If we guard, care for, and develop this, and live in accordance with it, that is, if we truly "love God," then of a certainty God will give us that joy of

which St. Paul writes: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor. 2:9).

Now, brethren, we will kneel down with deeply touched hearts, and repeat the beautiful prayer of the great English convert, Cardinal Newman.

"Lord, in Thy arms I am at rest. If Thou boldest me, I have nothing to fear, if Thou forsakest me I have nothing to hope for. I know nothing of the future, but my trust is in Thee. Therefore I pray that Thou mayest give me that which is right for me: I pray that Thou mayest take away that which would imperil my salvation. I trust only in Thee, Thou knowest all things. If Thou sendest suffering and care, mercifully grant that I may have strength to bear them, keep me from anger and self-love. If Thou givest me health, strength, and success in this world, grant me grace that these gifts may not separate me from Thee. Grant that I may know Thee, believe in Thee, love Thee, serve Thee, and live for Thee, and that I may die at a time and in such a manner that may best serve to glorify Thee." Amen.

VI

THE HOLY TRINITY

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, says: "Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him" (Hcb. 11:6).

We must believe that God is. "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty," is the beginning of the Christian Credo, and the belief in one God is a fundamental pillar of Christianity. But the Christian faith has another doctrine just as important as the belief in one God; and it seems as though this other truth were in contradiction to the first.

"I believe in one God." Thus begins the Credo. But we also say: "I believe in the Holy Trinity." We say "I believe in God the Father Almighty." But we also say: "I believe in God the Son," and "I believe in the Holy Ghost." Both these truths are equally important. Anybody who does not believe in the one God, cannot be a Christian; but he who does not believe in the Holy Trinity, cannot be a Christian either. Without this fundamental tenet the whole of Christianity would be incomprehensible and void of meaning, because the Lord Jesus Christ and His labors, His teachings, and His sufferings are comprehensible only in the faith of the Holy Trinity.

Is there not, between these two beliefs, such a contradiction as to make one or the other impossible? In any case, on what grounds does our holy religion teach the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the most difficult trial of faith? Is not the doctrine of the Trinity an absurdity, is

it not a denial of human common sense? If it is truly a manifested tenet of faith, does it exert any influence upon our religious life?

These questions await an answer in today's sermon. First, then, we will examine on what basis Christianity teaches the belief in the Holy Trinity. Then we will endeavor to give an answer to any difficulties that may arise. Lastly, we will examine what this doctrine signifies in our spiritual life.

ON WHAT BASIS WE PROFESS BELIEF IN THE
HOLY TRINITY

Belief in the Trinity is a special teaching of our Christian religion. This is the great gate, the only entrance, through which everyone must pass who wishes to reach the soil of Christianity. The Lord Jesus Himself erected this gate through which all must pass if they wish to become His disciples. "Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19).

No one can be a Christian without being baptized. But no one can be baptized except in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. That is to say, no one can be a Christian unless he believes in the Trinity.

The Holy Trinity. The profoundest mystery of the Christian faith. One Godhead, but three divine Persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, and still not three Gods: there is only one God. One God in three Persons; not three somethings, but three Someones.

Who understands this? Not human reason. Who can imagine this? Not human fancy. Who believes this? With humble faith, every Christian believes it.

But why do we believe it? Because and only because our Lord Jesus taught this. He taught it so clearly that

we must believe His words. Where did He teach this? Well, here are a few instances.

He proclaims clearly that He is "the Son of God," but in a sense quite unlike that in which we call ourselves sons, adopted sons of God. God, then, has a Son. Again He says: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). But there are not therefore two Gods. "God" and the "Son of God" are not two Gods.

Holy Writ speaks not only of the Son of God, of the second divine Person, but also of a third divine Person, the Holy Ghost. We read, for example (Matt. 3:16), that when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, the Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove. We read (John 14:16, 17), that our Lord promised He would send the Holy Ghost, the spirit of Truth which would abide with His Apostles forever. We read (John 20:22) that, on Easter evening, He breathed on them that they might receive the Holy Ghost and power to remit sins. And we have already noted that He sent them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matt. 28:19).

These are such clear, unmistakable statements, that we cannot evade accepting the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Do we understand it? No. Do we believe it? With bowed head.

One of the most penetrating philosophers, St. Augustine, was one day engaged in reflecting upon this profound mystery of the faith, walking up and down by the sea-side—you surely know this charming story. A little boy was playing on the beach, pouring sea-water from a cockle-shell into a hole he had made in the sand. He wanted to pour the endless sea into that little hole. The great philosopher told him smilingly that he would never succeed. "Sooner than mortal human sense will discern the nature of God, and understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity," answered the child.

II

THE DIFFICULTIES

If this little parable is right, and if it is true that we cannot comprehend the mystery of the Holy Trinity, still we may reflect upon it and try to meet the difficulties that may be encountered. For I well feel how disquietude, contradiction, and doubt may arise in the minds of many, on hearing what has been said of the Holy Trinity.

Some may think: In the Holy Trinity we have to believe something which is contrary to human sense. I hear this objection raised: Three cannot possibly be one. And one cannot be three." Truly, one cannot be three, and three cannot be one. If the Christian religion should require me to believe such an impossibility, then I would not be a Christian, either.

But in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity there is no word of all this. We do not believe that God is only one person, and also three persons; and we do not believe that God has only one nature, and also three natures. This would be an absurd assertion. But we believe that what is in certain respects one, is in other respects three. God is one if we consider His nature, but three if in this one nature we consider His person.

Human reason has continually tried to approach this mystery in some way, but will never be able wholly to understand it. St. Augustine, one of the ablest-minded men, continually occupied himself with it, and drew interesting comparisons from the phenomena of nature. The mystery became somewhat clearer, but finally he arrived at the pleasant scene by the seaside.

Harken to a few analogies proposed by St. Augustine. We cannot call the spring a river, nor the river a spring, and the sip we drink from the spring is called neither

spring nor river, although the same water is in all three. Then the spring, river, and drink are three, but the water is one. (*De fide et symb.*, chap, ix, 17.)

Another comparison is taken by St. Augustine from the three capabilities of spirit. Memory, intellect, and will: three capabilities of one and the same substance, the soul. (*De spirit.*, chap, ix, 12.)

Others attempted different analogies. One and the same thought is considered by three persons; there are three thoughts, but still only one fact, one subject.

Again, the sun shines on the water, and the picture of the sun appears on its surface; it shines upon a mirror and its picture is there, too; the picture of the sun is in the sky, on the water, and in the mirror: three pictures, one sun. Or, I can strike a chord of three notes on the piano: three notes, one chord. Again, I take an amethyst into my hand: seen from three points of view it displays three colors, yet is one. Then there is flowing water, ice, and mist: the substance of all three is the same, water. Electricity moves, heats, and lights: yet it is one.

Of course, this power of invention, which is displayed by the human mind in seeking similitudes, shows that each analogy is a lame one, and far from the truth. In what confusion art is also, in depicting the Holy Trinity. In the churches of the Middle Ages a great Y or T was drawn: these have three branches and still are only one. Today a triangle is often drawn, with God's all-seeing eye painted in the center. All these are merely human efforts, lame comparisons: and after every effort and every syllogism, we must say with belief in our heart: "We believe, though we do not understand."

But in our knowledge of the mystery of the Trinity, do we not perceive wonderingly how God has filled our way of thinking with the number three? I might venture to say that in the world there are obscure traces of the Holy Trinity. Everything has a beginning, a middle, and

an end. Every living being is born, grows, and dies. Time is past, present, and future. A German proverb has it that all good things are in threes: but how interestingly our Lord's words re-echo in this: "None is good but one, that is God" (Mark 10:18), the one triune God!

The Holy Trinity is a profound mystery for our reasoning powers; we do not understand it, but at least we see that it is not against reason, as the unbelievers say; it is only above our powers of reasoning. It would be against them, were we to assert that the three are one. No. We do not assert that there are three Gods, and yet these three are one; that would be ridiculous. But there are three divine persons in the one Godhead. Then, the divine substance or nature is not three, but one.

"I do not understand," this I can say; but that "it is against my reason," this I cannot say.

We do not understand. But not only we, mortal men, do not understand. Have you seen how great artists depict the angels in heaven? They kneel with bowed heads before God. How much more suitable is this position for earthly beings! "Down in adoration falling; lo, the mighty mystery we hail."

We do not understand. As when we come into the flood of dazzling light from a gigantic reflector, we feel that an immense brilliance envelops us, yet we see nothing but light, only light; as if our hearts wanted to stop beating. Do you know why we do not understand? Because one who wishes to understand the Holy Trinity, must first understand the infinity of God; into his little human mind he would have to compress the infinite God, pour the fathomless sea into the little hole in the sand.

In the year 304, at Catania in Sicily, the deacon Euplius was tortured to death for his Christian faith. His judge said to the martyr in his torment: "Unhappy one. Worship the gods. Honor Mars, Apollo, Aesculapius." The martyr replied: "I adore only the Father, the Son,

and the Holy Ghost. I adore the Holy Trinity, and there is no other God."

Yes, brethren, we adore the Holy Trinity, and there is no other God.

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WHAT THE HOLY TRINITY SIGNIFIES IN OUR
SPIRITUAL LIFE

But another, a different kind of question may arise in the hearts of my hearers, and I do not wish to leave this unanswered. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the most difficult truth of the Christian religion, the greatest trial of our faith. With our minds we do not understand it; yet we believe, because the Lord Jesus taught it. But—and this is the difficult question—why did Christ teach this? This doctrine apparently lies so far removed from spiritual life, leaving it so untouched, why did Christ reveal it, when He knew that we should never be able to comprehend it?

How many other problems would certainly have interested us, and of those He said nothing. When will be the end of the world? Is this not an important question? Christ did not tell us. Does the greater part of mankind attain salvation or is it doomed to perdition? What becomes of those infants who die without baptism? We should like to know all this; and of all this Christ said nothing.

He spoke of the Holy Trinity. But—do not take my words as irreverence—can we make nothing of this? True, we shall never comprehend the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Still we must be grateful to our Lord for declaring it to us, because the little that we do understand of it reveals glorious spiritual truths to us. In the knowledge of the Holy Trinity we understand God better, we worship God better, we love man better, and we can bear this

earthly life better. Then these are enough practical consequences.

i) First, by our belief in the Holy Trinity, the picture of God unfolds before us in more glorious lines. If we had not heard of the Trinity, the face of God would have remained so much fainter.

Let us attempt mentally to break away from earth and, casting off the chains of materiality, rise above the whole created world and prostrate ourselves before the throne of the eternal God.

What would we see there? Would we see the eternal God alone, left entirely alone? To go through life forsaken, not understood, without affection is a more bitter suffering than any illness.

Can we believe that God is eternally alone, that He remains forever not understood, because no creature can understand Him; that He remains forever without the love due to Him, because no creature can love Him properly? Then come the frivolous questions of the unbelievers: "What has God been doing eternally, when as yet the world did not exist? What did He do? Was He dull?"

Now hear what a splendid answer the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is to such questions. No one is capable of wholly knowing God, except God Himself: and this His knowledge we name God the Son. The Father and the Son love each other infinitely: and this infinite love, the one for the other, we name the Holy Ghost. And in this perfect understanding of God, and in this perfect love of God, God is forever and perfectly happy.

O blessed Trinity! We do not fully understand the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, yet what amazing depths this belief opens up to us of the wonderful life in God! With our belief in the Holy Trinity, what light and power we grasp in St. Paul's words: "King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, and inhabiteth light inaccessible, whom no man has seen nor can see: to whom

be honor and empire everlasting" (I Tim. 6:15, 16). How much more sublime does God thus become to us! O blessed Trinity!

2) But I go still further: for this reason God not only becomes sublimer to us, but we know better how to worship Him. We do not understand the mystery of the Trinity, we have only a faint idea of it, but what we know is sufficient to fill us with deep reverence. If a child loses its father at an early age, and only a little faded photograph of him remains, with what veneration does the child look upon the dim features of his father! Should not this pious feeling increase within us, must not an immense wave of reverence rise within us as often as we pronounce the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?

Of course, such a profound religious tenet easily remains outside the center of our interest unless we endeavor to draw it more closely into our spiritual life.

In the divine substance there are three Persons, and these three Persons are the one God—this we profess. However, we do not stop with this, but continue to think further. If "Person," then someone to whom we can speak, of whom we can make a request, whom we can love, that is, with whom we can enter into personal relations. Here this great mystery at once comes close to us. We are in a personal relation to God, we speak and give thanks to Him from whom we have received our life, our knowledge, our intellect, and our heart. We speak with the Son, who became flesh, who became our brother, who allowed His body to be pierced with nails for our sake, whose blood was spent for us. We speak with the Holy Ghost, who, as the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, flows into our soul; from whom spring all our good resolutions and every right act of ours. When we thus humbly pray to the Holy Trinity, we understand it better than with any amount of philosophical exposition.

Thus we now appreciate why holy Mother Church sounds the praise of the Holy Trinity so frequently. We begin and end our prayers with it. We begin and end mass and our sermons with it. The administration of the sacraments is combined with it, and the Church does not bless otherwise than in the name of the Holy Trinity. At the conclusion of her psalms and hymns and prayers, the glorification of the Holy Trinity resounds. "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be." O blessed Trinity!

3) But let us attempt to bring the stupendous doctrine of the Holy Trinity still nearer to our spiritual life. Do you know what else the belief in the Holy Trinity teaches? It teaches us love for one another.

The Lord Jesus Himself drew the most magnificent motives of love for one another from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He prayed at the Last Supper with deep emotion for His disciples, "that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21).

Above our heads is the life-sustaining sun. It strengthens life, warms, and also lights: in a triple activity still one. Again an analogy to the understanding of the Holy Trinity. But the sun is not such a quiet, motionless ball of fire as, seen through the clouds, it sometimes appears to be; but it is the scene of frequent electrical storms, the ever-moving, active scene of formidably eruptive flame-craters. Perhaps we might be allowed to use the analogy in connection with God, the triune and yet one God, who is not motionless but is forever active, creative power and life-giving love.

Our Christian forefathers especially liked to dedicate their hospitals to the Holy Ghost. In some way their more deeply religious spirits felt that the succoring, gentle, self-sacrificing love for our fellow-men blooms best in those

who reverence the Holy Trinity with pious love, that Holy Trinity in which the eternal love, the one for the other, of the Father and the Son, is called the Holy Ghost. God is the God of love, and only one who loves God very greatly, can love his fellow-men too, and fulfil the law (Mark 12:31), for "God is charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him" (I John 4:16).

4) Lastly, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity gives strength to bear this earthly life. God understands Himself, and this is God the Son. "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness" (I John 1:5). If we live according to God's will, that is, if we live in God, then our own life will be light, will be lived in the light; we will understand our life even if, according to earthly seeming, we live in a bank of dark clouds, in misery and suffering, and even if our life should be quite meaningless, too.

The Father and the Son love each other, and this is the Holy Ghost. "God is charity" (I John 4:8). Then if we live in God, we inhale the life-giving and fortifying divine love even when the bitterness and lovelessness of earthly life is clutching at our heart.

Thus the mystery of the one triune God not only allows a dazzling glimpse of God's nature and throws light upon it, but it radiates healing light and strength upon life's grievous wounds also. O blessed Trinity!

Dear brethren, it is a common belief among the people that the eagle takes its young up to an immense height when they are a few days old and causes them to look into the sun. If they are able to bear the glaring light without blinking, she acknowledges them as her own, but if they begin to blink, she lets them fall, to dash themselves in pieces:—they are not worthy offspring of hers.

Our holy Mother the Church truly behaves as popular report tells us the eagle does. The infant, when a few days old, is confronted at his baptism with the most

tremendous, the most difficult truth, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; and only when he has confessed his faith in the Trinity does holy Church acknowledge him as her son and admit him to membership. From this moment on, the belief in the Blessed Trinity accompanies us all our lives. From our first making of the sign of the cross, when we become aware of our reasoning powers, this belief continues with us until our last hour, right up to that solemn moment when, in full possession of our senses, we say farewell to life. Christians begin their wills with the words: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

The first religious thought to reach our ears in this world was the avowal of faith in the Holy Trinity at our baptism. The last religious thought we shall hear on our deathbed will be the words of the priest, as he prays: "Depart, O Christian soul, out of this sinful world, in the name of God, the Father Almighty, who created you: in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered and died for you: in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified you." And he will continue in these words: "We commend to Thee, O Lord, the soul of Thy servant. . . . Let his soul be flooded with the joy of Thy presence. . . . Although he has sinned, still he has not given up his faith in Thee, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

O yes, we wish to believe in God, we wish to worship Him faithfully. When we honestly fulfil the duties which our earthly career has imposed upon us, then, we know, we are serving the Lord. When we pray in words, when we go to church, when we confess our sins and receive holy communion, we are serving Him still better. But if we endeavor to be kind, gentle, forgiving, and merciful to everyone, if we strive to live without sinning and to keep His commandments, then we are serving Him best of all.

O Lord, in the name of the Holy Trinity I received

baptism; I have made the sign of the cross countless times in the name of the Holy Trinity; in the name of the Holy Trinity I wish some day to take leave of this world* Grant that the bliss of my life eternal may be the sight of the Holy Trinity face to face. Amen.

VII

GOD THE CREATOR

Nearly three thousand years ago the inspired Hebrew poet exclaimed in one of his Psalms: "O Lord our Lord, how admirable is Thy name in the whole earth" (Ps. 8: i). Yet at that time hardly anything was known of this wonderful world. The fossil remains of the different periods were unknown, the dazzling realm of the heavenly bodies was unknown, and the steam engine, electricity, and radio were unknown. Since then the world has grown tremendously before our eyes; our conception of God must develop in like manner. With more reason than the Psalmist of three thousand years ago, we can exclaim with perfect justification: "How great, O Lord, are Thy works!"

When the rushing mountain torrent roars, when the hurricane rages, when the lightning flashes, we cry out: "How great, O Lord, are Thy works!"

When the sun rises in May, when the evening glow spreads across the sky, when the snowy Alpine peaks are bathed in rosy light, we cry out: "How great, O Lord, are Thy works!"

When we count our heart-beats, when we look through a microscope at the many thousand living beings in a drop of water, when through a telescope we watch the stupendous rush of gigantic celestial bodies, we exclaim: "How great, O Lord, are Thy works!"

"In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (Gen. i:1). These are the very first words of the Bible, and praise of God the mighty Creator is heard from the lips of prophets and Psalmist throughout the whole Scriptures (Is. 40:26; 42:5; Jer., chap. 10; Prov. 16:4).

The Psalmist sings: "My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 120:2). St. Paul writes: "For of Him, and by Him, and in Him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36), and that He "quickeneth the dead; and calleth those things that are not, as those that are" (Rom. 4:17), and that He "made the world and all things therein" (Acts 17:24).

"God is Almighty," the Scriptures declare in many places (for example, Esther 13:9; Apoc. 11:17; 15:3; 16:7); but if that were not said, this is the divine attribute most easily recognized by man, who is equally aware of the immensity of the world and of his own weakness and impotence.

In a summer storm the thunder peals and the lightning flashes in the sky, the earth we had thought firm shakes beneath us, the wildly rushing wind tears up oak-trees by their roots, the river which is in flood roars and tumbles—all these are shattering moments in which the thought springs to our minds: How almighty must the Creator be, who with one single thought called all these forces into being! "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth."

I wonder if we can account to ourselves for all that follows if truly the world and everything therein is the work of God? I wish to devote today's sermon to considering the many instructive and encouraging thoughts that spring from our belief that God is the Creator of the whole world.

I

THE ENJOYMENT OF NATURE

If God is the Creator of the world, the first consequence of that truth is the fact that the beauty of the world fills us with justifiable happiness, and the enjoyment of nature is a deeply Christian feeling.

1) The enjoyment of nature. What a generally adopted

catchword this has become in our day, when man has at last come to see that, from the huge city buildings, the hot city pavements, the dusty, smoky, gasoline laden air of the streets, he must sometimes take refuge in God's open country. Week-end excursions, mountain-climbing, sun-bathing, air-bathing—these are all proper, legitimate recreations. Only do not let us forget to take that short step which raises our spirits from mere sensual enjoyment of nature to supernatural heights: that, when the stars shine above us, when the lightning plays, when the trees of the forest rustle, when the birds sing, when the sea murmurs, and the mountain-torrent rushes by, in all these we may hear a pæan of praise to the great God.

But is this not a strained connection—while enjoying the beauties of nature, to think of God? Not at all. We shall see this immediately if we call to mind another thought.

2) I believe in God the Creator. God created everything and holds everything in being: so the whole world is filled with God. In the body the soul is everywhere at work: without the soul the eye does not see, without the soul the ear does not hear, the lips do not speak, the hand does not move. So, too, this whole world lives and exists only in so far as God lives and is in it. The whole world is filled with God. Only a person imbued with this thought walks with seeing eyes in the world, only such a one knows how to enjoy nature in the right way.

Nature is not God, it is not the first cause. It is only an implement in God's hand. When we say that nature brought about this and that, we are not speaking correctly. Because it would not be right, would it, if we were to say of a picture by Murillo, that the brush and paint brought it about? Or if we were to say of a clock, that the main-spring and the wheels brought it into being? When we are delighted with a picture, may we forget the painter? And in looking at a clock, may we ignore the clockmaker?

And in the enjoyment of nature, may we be unmindful of its Maker?

Not many years ago (in 1927) the whole civilized world celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the death of that great prince of composers, Beethoven. One of the biographies then published (*Beethoven*, by Hellinghaus) contains touching details of a conversation that Beethoven held with an English manufacturer while walking in the open.

Beethoven sat down on a grassy bank and began speaking as follows: "Here, among the beauties of nature, I love to sit for hours at a time. My senses are immersed in the contemplation of the creations of nature. Here the sunshine is not hidden from me by a man-made roof; the one and only infinite, splendid arch is the blue sky. If I observe the skies of an evening and watch the dazzling heavenly bodies that move with eternal regularity in their courses, the suns, the planets, which are so many million miles above me, then my spirit rises beyond all these to the primary source, from which every created thing originates. If I afterwards attempt to give expression to my over-strained feelings in sound, I feel disappointment in myself. At such times I feel that there is no mortal who could give form—either in sound or color or with the chisel—to those heavenly pictures of which such an awakened imagination has a presentiment in some fortunate hour."

Beethoven then rose and, pointing heavenwards, enthusiastically continued: "Yes, everything which uplifts the heart must proceed from above. Otherwise one creates only notes and body without soul. Am I not right? The soul must strive upward toward the source whence it sprang, and only by painstaking labor can the created honor the Maker and Maintainer of infinite nature." This is indeed the correct, religious way to contemplate nature.

The belief that God created this whole world gives us

penetrating eyes that pierce every layer, every surface, and, seeing to the depths of world events, perceive in everything the hidden thought of God the Creator. If, then, our eyes are such, so is our life. The poet looks at a flower, and in his sight the flower becomes a song. Shakespeare walks along the street, and in his eyes the street becomes a stage. The religious man goes through life, and his eyes see in every event, even in suffering and in misfortune, the hand of God.

"What a pity, that beside the roses there are always thorns!" grumbles the infidel. "How good God is, to have given roses beside the thorns," says the believer. This is the spiritual way to contemplate nature.

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THE EXPLORATION OF NATURE

From our belief that the whole world was created by God, other truths follow. If the world is a great picture book, which speaks of God, then it is our duty to know this book ever better, to turn its pages ever more frequently, that they may tell us more and more of God.

We sometimes hear it said that Christianity views with anxiety and alarm the modern man's untiring investigation of the world's hidden forces. "Religion fears the light of knowledge": thus the enemies of Christianity usually express this thought, briefly and roughly.

1) Does religion need to fear knowledge, investigation? On the contrary. It rejoices in them. The greater the number of natural laws discovered by the human mind, the more sublime the face of God becomes. Who made these marvelous laws? Mark well it was not man that made them: man only discovered them. And if the man of three thousand years ago, who had only a faint idea of God's works, prostrated himself before Him, what reverent dread should fill our hearts, who know the world

a hundred times more beautiful, more marvelous! Hence the religious point of view not only does not obstruct scientific research but, on the contrary, it furthers it.

Listen to what happened in Munich to a scientist who was examining the leg of a beetle. Just then a friend unexpectedly came to visit him. Seeing how the scientist was engaged, the friend remarked: "I don't understand how anyone can occupy himself with such things." The scientist replied: "If the Lord God found it not beneath His dignity to create such things, then man need not be ashamed of studying them."

My belief in God continually spurs me on and impels me to explore nature's laws. Copernicus, the first discoverer of the cosmic system, dedicated his chief work to Pope Paul III. Therein he declares how he came to his new idea, and why he could not be content with the old explanation: because it was not sufficiently harmonious, it was not worthy of the world's infinitely wise Maker. The impulse to the immense work of Copernicus was prompted by his fervent faith.

2) But with this I have pointed out a new inference. If the world is really God's work, of which Holy Writ says that God gave it to man to have dominion over it, then humanity's feverish activity and research work are raised above the level of the struggle for daily bread, to the height of the fulfilment of God's commandments.

Work was never easy, nor is it so today. But it is easier to bear this burden, as soon as we can associate a lofty conception with it. "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28), is the Creator's command to man. If we are aware of this, we feel that every feverish, pulsating labor of ours—our feats of technical daring, the flights round the world, our submarines, our wireless, our vanquishing of bacilli, all our machines, our microscopes and telescopes—all are the fulfilment of God's command. When the forces hidden by the Creator in nature are used by man

for the advancement of his own noble aims, then he is acting on the basis of a divine trust. Who cannot see what an appreciation of the most scientific and technical work this conception signifies? If this is our way of thinking, then not only does the glorification of God ring in the lark's song, the chattering of the brook, and in the roar of the tempest, but God is praised by the whirring of the dynamos, the thunder of machinery, the red glow of the smelting furnaces. From all this stupendous noise, from the creaking of wheels, the clatter of the weaving-loom, from the hum of the motors, a majestic symphony resounds to the honor of that Creator who permitted all these things to be discovered for the assistance of man. I believe in the Almighty God, the Creator.

Let us explore and plan: let us subjugate nature, only do not let us become dazzled, do not let us believe that we are undisputed masters and creators of the world. Man easily believes this. But when his arrogance knows no bounds, then here or there the earth quakes, and hundreds are buried under the ruins: an ocean liner collides with an iceberg, a river overflows its banks, a tornado sweeps away towns, a dirigible explodes, and machine, dynamo, metal ribs, and luxurious cabin are blown to atoms. Man, you are not the creator of the world. Yours is the earth, the sea, the air, but you remain a man, a little insect. Your express train rushes, your automobile races, your airplane glides swiftly, but you are man, of dust and ashes. And forget not to bow your head before the Creator. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.



THE BROTHERHOOD OF MANKIND

From our belief, in which we declare God to be the Creator of the whole world, a new and splendid truth is

derived: the sublime doctrine of the brotherhood of mankind.

If God created the whole world, then He created all men, too. And if God created every one of us, then we are all brethren. Behold the joyous truth of human solidarity as a splendid blossoming of Christian faith.

Let us love one another, for we are brethren in need one of the other and, if we do not love one another, we do not love our heavenly Father.

i) We all—white and black, red Indian and yellow Oriental, learned and ignorant, renowned and obscure—we are all human brethren in need one of the other. How greatly we have need of one another, may be illustrated by one or two striking examples.

Look at yourself from head to foot. What an elegant hat you have in your hand! Where did you buy it? In such or such a hat store? Yes. But have you ever considered how it came to be there, in that shop? How many of your fellow-men worked upon it, formed it, dyed it, ironed it, packed it, and sent it off, your hat, until it came into your possession? Then your new dress. How many fellow-men worked on the making of the material, the buttons, the thread, and the sewing of it?

What of the roll which you ate at breakfast? How many people worked on that? The farmer who sowed the wheat, the reaper, the thresher, the miller, the baker, the shopkeeper. And your morning coffee? The negro laborer who, somewhere many thousand miles away from here, planted the coffee. The picker of the berries, the packer, the dock-laborer who laded it, the stoker, employed on board the ship that transported it, the wholesale merchant, and the local grocer from whom you bought it.

So you see, we are all brethren in need one of the other. We cannot take a step, we cannot sleep or eat without

being compelled to accept help from our fellow-men. A thousand hands work for me, a thousand brows are bathed in perspiration for my sake.

But if this is so, has it occurred to us that we should likewise work for others, that service requires service in return? How plainly this is said in Christ's command: "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them" (Matt. 7:12).

2) Let us love one another; for he who does not love his neighbor, cannot love God. The man of today needs to hear this truth often repeated. The Germans have an interesting saying, that he who asserts he loves God, yet does not love his fellow-men, seeks to please the devil. Someone may go to church frequently and wear out his knees in praying incessantly, may cover his walls with Bible texts, and be shocked at the wickedness of man—all this is false religiosity on his part, if his alleged love for God is not accompanied by love for man, if at home he is insufferable, capricious, quarrelsome, if he takes offense at the slightest word, if he cannot forgive and forget, if he is exacting, and criticizes everyone—what else shall I say?—if he denies that we are all children of one Father, and therefore brethren.

IV

THE TRUTH OF OUR FAITH

Have we finished? Have I said everything that follows upon the thought of an Almighty Creator? Indeed not. Do you know what is consequent upon the fact that God is omnipotent? The truth of our sacred faith is consequent on this. Those doctrines which are of fundamental importance to our faith, and of which, even if we do not understand them, we say with firm faith: "Almighty God is able to ensure their reality."

Almighty God is able to make original sin disappear from our soul at the moment when the baptismal water touches our forehead.

Almighty God is able to make the Lord Jesus appear under the form of bread at the moment when the priest, celebrating mass, says the words of our Savior over the white host.

Almighty God is able to make our soul as white as snow at the moment when our confessor says: "I absolve thee from thy sins."

Finally, Almighty God is able to ensure that, at the moment He issues His command on Judgment Day, everyone of all the millions that ever lived shall rise from the dead to new life. What an immense thing! For us an unimaginable moment. But the words of the Lord Jesus compel us to believe this. "With men it is impossible: but not with God: for all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

How well it is for the soul in sorrow, or for one in fear of death, if he can pray above the graves with steadfast faith: "I believe in the Father Almighty." If God is our Father, then it is quite natural that where our Father is, there our final home is, too. "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come" (Heb 13:14). I believe in the Father Almighty, the Creator.

Dear brethren, a certain German author (Eichendorff) has written a charming poem expressing sentiments with which I should like our feelings to be attuned and harmonized.

It is late evening, the poet writes, a stormy dark night: husband and wife sit silently in the room—they have recently buried their little child. A storm howls against the walls of the house, wind beats upon the door. Listen, now someone is knocking at the door. Let us look quickly; perchance it is our little dead son wanting to come home. Then the parents suddenly correct themselves. To come home? Why, he is at home, and it is we who must go

home. He is at home, and we must first go home. What a true, profound Christian thought!

Ah, poetry! It is easy for the poet to make his imaginary hero speak like that. But can one attain such a sublime state of mind in reality, too? you will ask me. And I answer: Listen to this true happening.

It was in 1865. Wiseman, the cardinal-bishop of Westminster, was living his last few hours. The doctors informed him that they had come to the end of their human skill. In a little while the nursing Sister enters and the cardinal asks her: "Did you hear what the doctors said?" "No," she answers, "I did not hear, but I can guess." "They said," continues the dying man, "that I am going home. Is that not beautiful?" "For you," she replies. "But for us?" The cardinal then says: "Do you know what homesickness is? I go, that I may be with my Father. I am like a child who goes home, that he may be with his father."

Brethren, who does not now remember our Lord's farewell words: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and I go to the Father" (John 16:28)? Who does not remember the Psalmist's words: "Blessed is he who hath the God of Jacob for his helper, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Ps. 145:5)? And who would not think to exclaim: "Almighty Creator God, Lord of life and death, give each one of us such a calm and quiet death"?

Now let us kneel, brethren, and pray with humble words: Our Father Almighty, Creator, who with a single word called this marvelously great world into being; who lighted the fire of the sun above us, and the gentle glow of the stars; who adorned the earth and flooded the skies with the blush of dawn; who caused the thunder to roar, but upon the clouds painted the rainbow, too; who causes the green forest to grow high and who ripens the yellow ears of grain: grant that we may see Thy holy will in

all things, and that we may obey Thy will. *Of Thee* the shy-eyed fawns speak to us, of Thee the tireless little crickets chirp . . . everything, everything cries to us in the words of the Psalmist: "Our Lord our Lord, how admirable is Thy name in all the earth !" (Ps. 8: 10.)

Our Father, Creator, help Thou us to pass through this earthly life in such spiritual integrity and such unselfish love, that in our last hour we may be able to lay our tired heads calmly in Thy mighty, fatherly hand. Amen.

VIII

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

In the sixth chapter of his book, the prophet Isaias describes God in a sublime vision. He sees Him sitting on a high throne in the splendor of the heavens, while adoring seraphim stand before Him, but even they cover their faces with their wings from the resplendency of God, and from their lips the hymn of homage and glorification never ceases: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts.

Besides Isaias, many others in the Bible speak of God's holiness. There is no iniquity in God (Deut. 32:4), Moses writes. Says the Psalmist: "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:7); and the prophet Habacuc: "Thou canst not look on iniquity" (1:13). All this is, in a way, negative. But in a positive manner, as we read in the Psalms: "The Lord . . . is holy in all His works" (Ps. 144:17); and in the Book of Kings: "There is none holy as the Lord is" (I Kings 2:2).

Certainly, if we turn the pages of Holy Writ, we see that, besides the divine attributes of omnipotence and mercy, God's holiness is praised and emphasized most strongly. It is therefore not strange that Christianity never ceases to sing: "Thou art holy, O Lord, Thou art holy, Thou art holier than all."

If God is holy, He is the enemy of all evil. The sun is the enemy of the night, the sunshine of the shadow, the heat of the ice—the holy God is the enemy of evil. This is the first inference we must draw from God's holiness, and we will consider this in the first half of today's sermon: How much the holy God abhors sin in man.

But God's holiness is not only negative; it is positive as well. The holiness of God not only implies the prohibition of sin, but is the norm of every moral law, the original source of all derived holiness. How He must rejoice in human goodness, in our upward striving! How greatly the holy God loves virtue in man! Of this I shall speak in the second half of this sermon.

HOW GREATLY GOD ABHORS EVIL

The very first thought, then, which arises in connection with God's holiness is this: If God is holiness itself, how very greatly He must abhor evil! If God is sheer holiness, how greatly the sum of human sins must grieve Him! If God is nothing but holiness, how angry He must be with the inveterate evil-doer!

God "abhors" evil, God is "grieved" by sin, God is "angry" with the evil-doer. I beg you, brethren, to understand well these human expressions. In God there are no passions, so there is neither impatience nor anger nor grief nor abhorrence. Holy Scripture, and therefore we too,—of course, in a human figurative manner—speak so frequently of the wrathful God, of the God who abhors sin, and of the grief of God, that the inflexibility of His holy will may appear so much the more sublime to us.

That God's will is inflexible toward evil and that the holy God—to speak in a human way again—cannot abide evil and sinners, for this we have a startling proof. Do you know what it is? Hell, the place of eternal damnation, the place of eternal suffering.

Brethren, in what glaring contrast must evil be to the holy God, what an appalling monstrosity must evil be, if it compelled the holy God to create a place, the place of perdition, wherein to thrust inveterate lovers of sin! No one can reconcile eternal damnation with God's good-

ness, no one is capable of explaining it, but he that knows God is holy, thrice holy, who can be approached by no evil nor by any created being who has given himself to evil.

God is our Father. A sublime idea of God. But does not another truth of our faith contradict this? Which truth? That one in which the Church teaches that God is an infinitely strict Judge, who can thrust the sinner into eternal perdition, who can condemn him to never-ceasing pain. "That is a dreadful dogma," say many; but only those who forget God's holiness.

1) Now I put this question: Would it be possible for someone with a distorted, soiled, and filthy soul to live through an eternity with the holy God who does not know even the shadow of evil? Is it possible that, no matter how we use our free will, we can reach the same goal? If, during the probation years of this life, in full deliberation, we obstinately live, speak, and behave differently from the way the holy God enjoins; if, to all God's efforts to save, our answer is a wicked life and if we veritably turn our back on God, well, what will God answer to that? God never thrusts anyone into hell, but man himself goes there. God did not thrust him away; he first fell away from God.

The slave of sin excludes himself from the holy God's realm. For we do not gain eternal life as we gain the first prize in a lottery; we must grow into it, develop roots in it. We put forth roots in this earthly life, and with a well-spent earthly life our tree grows into eternal life.

2) Let us suppose that there is no damnation, but that every manner of life leads to eternal bliss, to God. What would be the consequence? That the difference between good and evil would cease to exist. Sin and virtue, shame and honor, love and selfishness cease to differ; for the end of all is eternal bliss. If everyone comes to God by

all roads, then there is no longer any reason for moral exertion, honor, work; then we have nothing else to do than to lie in the sun and let it shine upon us. Yes, the doctrine of hell is a bewildering one, but on the other hand, if we deny eternal punishment, we practically become as the atheists.

Hell. A terrible word. Father and hell: these are hardly compatible ideas. But God is not only a good God. He is also a holy God, and with God's holiness the condemnation of incarnate evil is combined.

If that is so, I take the consequences. What consequences? God is holy, then what very great care I must take of my soul that, as far as in my power lies, I may not be too great a contrast to God! How careful must I be of my soul when, according to Holy Writ, "the heavens are not pure in His sight," "and in His angels He found wickedness" (Job 15:15; 4:18)! This sentence makes us shudder. In God's sight the heavens are not sufficiently pure, nor are the angels. Then what are we?

Here is another sentence of Holy Writ: "And yet man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred" (Eccles. 9:1). Then what will happen, when we stand before this infinitely holy God; when He reproaches us because He created us a diamond and we have become black coal, because He created us as crystal, and we have soiled ourselves as soot, because He created us as a mountain-lake, and we are parched and dried up?

Only in the light of God's holiness do we see that over and above every trial, every misery, every illness, only one real and terrible disaster can happen to us, and that is sinning.

Now I put one more question, a painful, disquieting question. My brother, if now today, at this moment, you should have to appear before the holy and just God, could you stand calmly before Him? Before that God who is not deceived by any external seeming; before

whom not one of our hidden aims is concealed? True, Almighty God takes into account every taint, all harmful inherited inclinations, the effects of evil surroundings; but enough will remain, even after that: the burden of individual responsibility. True, God is merciful. But there are the blind who did not want to see God, because they felt more contented in the darkness. There are the deaf who did not want to hear God's word, because then they would have been obliged to alter their lives. There are the paralyzed who did not want to walk, for they would have been obliged to turn away from the road they had hitherto followed. If these should appear before God?

O thrice holy God, teach me to see evil clearly, to see that, more than all pain, all illness, all death, there is something much more bitter to be deplored—sin, evil.

II

HOW GREATLY GOD LOVES VIRTUE

From God's holiness another truth follows: How greatly He loves virtue, honest human effort, the conquest of evil. The holy God appears not only as a negative, threatening warning to us, but as positive also, as a mighty source of uplifting, edifying spiritual inspiration.

"Be holy because I am holy," saith the Lord in the Old Testament (Lev. 11:44). Our Savior repeats this: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

Never in this world has a doctrine been heard that brings more blessed consequences than does that brief sentence, which is such an ennobling Magna Charta for the human soul.

Let us examine what this command requires of us, and whether it requires too much of us.

1) Consider what a splendid path opens up before us in the traces of that divine command. The river does not

rest till it reaches the sea, the magnetic needle does not rest until it points toward the North: the human soul does not rest until it finds God.

Life is development. Development must have a goal. The Lord Jesus assigned our development its only worthy goal when He uttered those eternally memorable words: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

The world never had a philosopher who set, even approximately, so exalted a goal for man. What was the ideal life of Democritus, Zeno, Epicurus compared with this? Or even the ideals of noble Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle?

To become like unto God. What a stupendous task! What a realization of ancient Greek mythology! The Greeks ventured to think of such things only in myths. According to them, Apollo once put down his lyre upon a stone, and the stone drank in the last dying chords thirstily: whosoever finds that wonderful stone and holds it to his ear, hears the divine music of Olympus. However, this is only poesy, a vagary. Yet it is not poesy, not a myth, but sacred truth, that in every human soul the image of Godlikeness slumbers. In the strings the melody is slumbering, awaiting only the hand of the artist. In the bells the joyous chime slumbers, awaiting only the bell-ringer. In my soul the image of God slumbers, awaiting only the work of my co-operation. And if my work succeeds—the only fatefully decisive task of my life—then I shall be a living harmony, a ceaseless festive chime, proclaiming God's glory. "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect"; that is, "Be like unto God."

God is pure spirit. And we shall be like unto Him, if we ensure the reign of spirit, of our soul, within us. Must we, in a word, despise the body, turn our back on the world? No, I do not mean that. We live on this earth and

are of the earth, earthy. But the material must not smother the spiritual, the soul, within us.

I can give an excellent example of this; only understand me aright, dear brethren. Money, money! That is the stirring password of humanity today. It vibrates in the poor man's blood, it disturbs the rich man's dreams; for it he works day and night. St. Ladislaus also worked day and night. Why? That he might rid himself of his fortune. At last the document was prepared, in which he renounced all claim to his estate as margrave in favor of his brother. As he signed it, he asked his brother joyously: "Rudolf, what do you think? Which of us two is the happier? Certainly it is I."

The saintly nobleman retired to a monastery. In 1591 such a plague raged in Rome that nearly six thousand fell victim to it. The young margrave found lying in the street a person who had been stricken with the terrible scourge. Lifting him in his arms, he carried him to the hospital and nursed him. Ladislaus returned home ill, and not long afterward died at the age of twenty-four.

A simple story. But do you not feel the fascination, the poetry of the triumphant soul, the life-giving breeze of the high mountain-peaks, underlying it? Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.

2) But I feel the difficulty, the objection to this story, too. "We cannot follow that example, we fathers of families who are expected to maintain our offspring, we mothers who have not a moment's respite from daily cares. If that is the way to become a saint, we cannot . . ."

No, no, brethren, do not finish that sentence. I did not recount St. Ladislaus' example with the expectation that we could all imitate it today. O no. We need not imitate the deeds of the saints, but we should become imbued with that state of mind which enabled them to accomplish those deeds. Then this state of mind will show us how we can become saints today.

Now I put this great question, the most important question of today's sermon: What must we do to become saints? For become saints we must. Today God's words are still in force: "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. **n:44**).

Primitive races gave their leaders names in accordance with some outstanding quality they possessed. We all know, for example, the interesting names of American Indian chiefs, such as "Hawkeye," "Great Hunter," "Great Snake," "Brave Heart." These names can be given only by those who know the person in question with all his good and bad qualities. However, God alone knows man perfectly. It is therefore our duty to consider, in quiet moments of self-examination, what name God has given us.

That thought surprises you, but it is not so strange as it sounds at first. Read in the Apocalypse: "To him that overcometh, I will give the hidden manna, and will give him a white counter, and in the counter a new name written, which no man knoweth, but he that receiveth it" (Apoc. 2:17).

God gives each of us a name, a name different from that given to anyone else, and this name contains in itself our whole nature and warns us, calls our attention to the chief work which God expects us to bring to a conclusion during our earthly life. We are not responsible for the kind of person we were born, but we are indeed accountable for our efforts that we may not remain that sort of person. One has a testy disposition, another is naturally sensual, a third indolent, a fourth suspicious. We cannot help all this, for we were born so. But certainly we can perceive this in ourselves, and not be content with it. A person who recognizes his own greatest fault, knows his own hidden name, the name he received from God. For God does not give Indian names like "Scalphunter" or "Lynxeye," but such names as "Clean Hand," "Pure Heart," "Gentle Soul," "Helping Hand," "Stay True":

such names and others like them are given to everyone by God. And anybody who makes this name his life, becomes a saint. The saints of our time are those who struggle courageously that God's will may be fulfilled.

Are there saints today also? Do saints live among us today? Yes. Perhaps only a few of them reach the official recognition of the Church, canonization in the sight of men. But in God's sight surely many today are living the lives of saints: those who go through life quietly and obscurely. Usually it is not until we are returning from their funeral that we learn the whole world has become so very much the poorer by their loss. They are men and women who discharge their duties all their lives without complaining, who work faithfully in the post to which God calls them, but find time for their spiritual affairs also, who are generous and kind, radiating happiness, who perform no miracles, but whose whole life is a miracle: the living miracle of the co-operation of God's mercy and human free will. They bear their cross without complaint, walk through this tempting world without letting its temptations enter their hearts. In the bitter struggle of life today, they strive to attain the loftiness of our Lord's words: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."

Dear brethren, God is holy, and only He is holy. Any holiness besides His that can be found in this world, originates in Him, the primary source of all holiness. All the light in the world originates in the sun: the sun is mirrored in the dewdrop, and makes it lovely; the sun-beam sparkles on the jewel, and makes it precious; thus the holiness of God is reflected in the sinless human soul, making it beautiful and precious. How we should prize this sanctifying divine mercy! How readily we should take our stand to help gain the victory in the battle against evil waged within us!

Moreover, we work not merely upon ourselves, but, so

far as we can, we influence others also. "Hallowed be Thy name." We not only pray for this, but also work for it, that the life about us may be holier, and in this way we also honor the holy God. All praise to those devout mothers who sanctify their children's unfolding souls with warmest love and raise them Godward!

In many a family there are devout members from whose quiet example sanctifying strength flows to the entire household; there are zealous apostles who are grieved that men are so very far from being saints, that they have fallen away from God, from the primal source of all holiness. These good people do their utmost to lead such erring souls back to God. And while they are toiling to beautify others' souls, their own are becoming lovelier, holier, more radiant, more like unto God. For this is the final good of human life: to become ever more and more like the eternally holy God.

The ancient Romans had an interesting custom. When, through the vicissitudes of life, two friends were about to separate, they broke an earthen tablet, a so-called "tessera," in two. If after many years they again met, they brought out the carefully guarded pieces, and recognized each other by the precise fitting together of the pieces. Do not misunderstand me if I say: Our souls are little pieces broken from God. If only we do not spoil them. If only we guard them carefully. If only we do not disfigure them.

O eternally holy God, help me so to guard my soul, this little heavenly fragment from Thee, that when it returns to Thee, Thou mayest be able to fit it into its place again, that Thou mayest recognize Thyself in me, and acknowledge me as eternally Thine own. Amen.

IX

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Today I am going to speak of the good God. When we attach an adjective to God's name, we generally use the word "good": "The good God guard you," "the good God grant it," and so forth.

Is God truly good? I put this question, and Holy Writ answers: "Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made" (Wis. 11:25). Thus the Book of Wisdom speaks of God, indicating the goodness of His heart. But the prophet Isaiah goes still further, for in his writings God says: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Is. 49:15). A mother is surely good to her own child. But I, saith the Lord, am still kinder to thee. Is God truly good? I put this question. And through the whole world a thousand voices answer: God is good, God is good.

God is eternal life, life's primal source, and He rejoices in the exuberant welling-forth of life. "The eyes of all hope in Thee, O Lord," sings the Psalmist, "and Thou givest them meat in due season" (Ps. 144:15). Every sprouting branch, every opening bud, every verdant blade of grass, every twittering bird, and especially every palpitating human heart cries out: God is the God of life, who in His benignity rejoices in life. God is sufficient unto Himself, He needs nothing in the world; and yet, in His immeasurable goodness He has filled the world with life.

He even went beyond this. "God so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth

in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John 3:16). That we may have life everlasting. This everlasting life is not a simple continuation of the earthly one: it is the exaltation of human nature to the supernatural heights of divine life, where, in certain respects, we become participants in God's eternal glory. I now ask: Brethren, is not that God infinitely good, who loves us so greatly?

It is not enough that we believe God is infinitely good to man. We must also accept the consequences of this truth. The goodness of God places certain obligations upon us. And it also raises many problems that we must face honestly.

WHAT OBLIGATIONS DOES GOD'S GOODNESS
PLACE UPON US?

1) The first natural corollary of God's goodness is this: If God is good to us, we must be good to man.

a) It is timely that our attention be drawn to this, as goodness, kindness, consideration toward others, and the making of allowances are becoming lost accomplishments. So much so, that in France,—in imitation of various kinds of "weeks"—they have introduced a "kindness week," too. In the "kindness week" everyone is supposed to keep his petulance under control, to be kind, patient, polite, and good to all. Everyone is supposed to act thus. But actuality does not conform to this expectation. Spiritual strength, which true kindness denotes, is produced only by a religious way of thinking, and by the blessed self-control which this effects. Only he can be good to his fellow-men, who learns this goodness from God.

b) "None is good but one, that is God," says our Lord (Mark to; 18). Whatsoever goodness is in the world, emanates from God's infinite goodness. How bitter is life,

how full of tearful struggle» our earthly career! Then how we should bless the good ones of the earth, those who with smiling eyes and sympathetic hearts go quietly through life, bringing joy and peace and sunshine to all! Wherever they pass by, tears are dried and the faded flowers of happiness blossom again.

It would be most fitting if we Christians could truthfully say: We are good, because our God is infinitely good! We would become persuasive arguments for Christianity if people could say of us what was said of the fine, kind, good St. Francis de Sales, bishop of Geneva: "O God, how good Thou must be, if the Bishop of Geneva is already so very good!"

c) Only as an afterthought do I mention that the goodness we expend on others is never lost, for, when we are good to others, we bless ourselves. An English author has written a charming story to illustrate this thought.

There was a certain large garden in which children liked very much to play. But the heartless owner was angered that others enjoyed the beauty of his garden. So he built a high stone wall round it, to keep the children out. But what happened then? The flowers, not hearing the children's laughter, did not bloom. The foliage withered, too. Hard winter came with frost and snow, but spring did not come any more. The man watched and waited. But spring did not come. It did not come until the man, recognizing his fault, tore down the stone wall. As the children ran in, all at once everything became verdant and beautiful. So, too, our happiness is greatest when we make others happy. Let us be good to one another, because God is so good to us.

2) From the goodness of Almighty God something else follows: the Christian's humble faith in God's help.

a) What would it avail us if God were merely good, without being powerful? Many good people there are who would gladly help us, but they cannot. God, however, is

good and is willing to help; He is also almighty and, if He wishes, is able to help us, too. The Scriptures call God "almighty" in more than seventy places. "I am the Almighty God"; thus God spoke to Abraham (Gen. 17:1). And our Savior, in the Garden of Olives, calls upon the heavenly Father in these words: "Father, all things are possible to Thee" (Mark 14:36).

Once as St. Canute, king of Denmark, was walking along the seashore, one of his courtiers tried to flatter the king, saying that he was the most powerful lord of all, master of men, of the waters, and of the dry land. By way of reply, the King stood close to the sea and said: "Waves, I command you not to come as far as my feet." But the waves came. "How can you call me the most mighty king, when not even the little waves obey me? God is the mighty King of heaven and earth. Let us worship Him." This is a way of thinking that befits a Christian. We adore the good and Almighty God, and trust in Him.

b) Now here I must frankly say, that this subtle and tender faith in God's succoring goodness is more worthy of us than any kind of superstitious stupidity. If we are starting upon a journey, if we engage in some difficult enterprise, and likewise if we are confronted by any duty in life, we do everything that depends on our industry and ability to ensure success; then finally we add: "Lord, what we could do, we have done; now, therefore, stand Thou beside us with Thy helpful goodness." This is the proper Christian frame of mind.

Before we set out in an airplane, we look to the motor to see if it is in order, we examine the wings with care to see if they are firmly secured, and we look to see that every fastening is in its place. Then, after doing everything which depends on us, we add: "Lord, help us with Thy mighty goodness." Thus we set out on our journey in the calmness of that knowledge, but not with a pet

crocodile, not with a tortoise, not with a riding-crop, not with a black cat, not with a five dollar gold piece. These are not imaginary superstitions. Each of these articles is the talisman of some famous flyer, without which he would not start upon his flights.

Is it not a disgrace even to put the question: In which do you rather trust, in the good God or in the tortoise, in the good God or in the black cat?

If we have faith in the good God, then we have no faith in the "chain-prayers" that must be copied nine times and sent to nine people, nor are we intimidated by the threat that, if we do not pass them on to nine people, misfortune will overtake us. Nonsense. If we trust in the good God, we take no notice of such superstitions. Nor of other omens, either.

"Are you superstitious, dear lady?"

"I? What are you thinking of? I should be ashamed of myself in these enlightened times."

"But just now, when you told us that your husband was better, why did you touch the table?"

"O well, I touch wood to make sure that my words are spoken in a lucky hour and that the illness will not return."

"Indeed. And just lately, when we would have been thirteen at supper, why did you refuse to sit at table with the rest?"

"How can you ask? Where will you find anyone today, who would dare to sit down as the thirteenth?"

"Then you are superstitious, after all."

"No, not at all. Only, I'm cautious. For how can one know . . . what if . . . after all . . ."

What is this, brethren? A great sin? No. It is only an evidence that one has little faith in the good God, although His goodness makes it incumbent upon us to trust in Him. It reveals a want of confidence in the good God, our heavenly Father.

II

PROBLEMS IN CONNECTION WITH God's GOODNESS

From God's goodness not only do the consequences I have mentioned follow, but in connection with that goodness weighty problems arise.

1) I begin with the most difficult question, with the weightiest objection, with the agonizing problem which lies in the depth of many souls. We say: God is infinitely good. But, if He is infinitely good, how can He have created hell? If He is infinitely good, how can He thrust men into the dreadful depths of eternal damnation?

Brethren, what shall we reply to this, to this question which torments many hearts? Our faith teaches that God is infinitely good, and also that eternal damnation awaits those who die in mortal sin. How can we reconcile these two doctrines? How can that God be "good" who also brings eternal damnation into being? Let us try to face this distressing question.

a) I have already explained at some length that God is holy, and that His holiness and the malevolence of evil cannot be reconciled, for they stand in direct opposition the one to the other. And I showed that it is an impossibility for the evil-doer to spend eternal life near God, just as night cannot remain near the sun, and ice cannot remain near the heat.

b) But we have another reason for not allowing the goodness of God to be obscured even beside the dreadful light of hell-fire. And this other reason is found in two sentences of Holy Writ. One contains the words of God to the prophet Ezechiel: "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live" (Ezech. 33:11). The other sentence gives us the words of St. Peter: "The Lord . . . dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance" (11 Peter 3:9).

Do you know what these words signify? That God takes no pleasure in anyone being damned; rather He is grieved. God wishes to lead all to eternal salvation, and it would be His greatest good pleasure if, in fact, each one were saved. He does everything to this end. His only-begotten Son shed His last drop of blood to this end. What more could He have done for us? In the interest of our salvation He goes to the greatest length, to the utmost bounds; but there He halts. What marks these utmost bounds? Human free will.

c) And here, properly speaking, is the answer to the problem. Nobody is damned, except one who wishes to be. God thrusts no one from Him; it is man himself who breaks away from God.

To be human means to choose between good and evil. Man can side with evil, with sin, can revolt against God, be on the side of the rebels. He can become firmly established in that camp, can be obdurate in evil. If death finds him thus, how can he go to God, since he himself never wanted to reach God? He was obdurate, impenitent, wishing to know nothing of God. What will God now make of him? Eternal life is an exhilarating worship of God's splendor. But such a man in his whole life never longed for God.

Yes, God is good, but we must not take advantage of the fact that God is "good." Yet, how many do take advantage of it! Many drink greedily of evil, enjoy filth, wade deeply in the morass of sin, and quiet their uneasy conscience by saying to themselves: "Don't worry, God is good. The good God will forgive." Or they simply say: "The good God will make allowances."

Do such people know who God is, and what His goodness is? That goodness is not namby-pamby helplessness, not weakness and want of power. God is good, but He is also just. God is our Father, but He is also a strict Judge. Even as He is good to those who wished to belong to Him,

so He is a strict Judge to those who abused His goodness, who did not wish to live in accordance with His commands.

God is infinitely good. Before anyone falls into perdition, like a burnt-out star into darkness, God exhausts every saving means of His tender heart. If we could see how He tries in every way to save, how He calls into requisition the whole richness of His admonishing, inviting, helpful mercy, indeed it would not occur to us to doubt God's goodness because His holiness and justice require the condemnation of evil.

2) Again, there are others who denounce the goodness of God just because evil and injustice are not immediately punished. And here is the new problem of many. It is such a weighty question, which I now only mention—I shall not attempt its solution today—I merely touch upon it now.

What is this question? The problem of the good God and the evil world. Instead of a long explanation, I will give one example, that will show the essence of the question.

There was once a worthy devout woman who was overwhelmed by disasters. She had been an upright, honorable soul her whole life long, a devoted wife, a careful mother, a good Catholic. And within a year her husband and two children died, and her fortune was lost.

Then the spiritual equilibrium of the afflicted woman was upset, and a terrible thought found lodging in her mind: that God does not trouble Himself about us. In His sight we are teeming, hurrying little ants in whom He is not interested—He, the God enthroned at an immense distance. Nations wax and wane, spring comes and autumn passes, men rejoice and weep, the earth rushes on its blind course among the stars—God is not interested in all this. At least, He shows no interest. He is silent. You do what is right, and He does not show that He re-

joices in it. You wade in sin, and He does not show that this grieves Him. He is silent. He is also silent when the dismayed cry of the faithful soul breaks forth: "Dear Lord, how canst Thou make allowances for this, too?"

Brethren, I began like this: "There was once a worthy woman." I cannot give you her name or otherwise identify her. Tell me, was it not you? Did such thoughts never occur to you? When you see how the unscrupulous, the giddy, and the sinner prosper, and how the honest starve and are pushed aside; when you prayed so much for your sick child, and still he died: in the face of so much evil, so much trouble, have you not asked: Where is the good God now? This is the question which stifles us.

This dark earthly life, these anxious earthly struggles, this multitude of tears and complaints: all these afflictions oppress our soul. We begin this earthly life with weeping, and end it with grief. We are surrounded by mysteries, problems, and doubts. Can that God really be good, if He is able to look upon this world and permit it to be a valley of tears? This is a difficult, soul-shaking question, a question not easy to answer, a question that lurks in the depth of thousands of hearts. Our answer will be two-fold: God does not wish evil and trouble; if He permits them, He seeks to bring good out of them.

a) God does not wish evil. This world of today is not as God originally planned it. God did not plan suffering or misery or death. Into His original plan came the interruption caused by man's free will, the first human sin; and that ruined everything. "By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death" (Rom. 5:12).

Of course, such an answer cannot satisfy us, for we well know it is insufficient. The answer is indeed true, but doubts are not scattered by it. It tells us, certainly, how we came to this; but it does not tell us how God, the good God, allows all this misery, torment, and pain. He certainly did not wish it—that I see—but He tolerates it.

b) Therefore I must delve deeper for the answer, and point out God's mysterious plans in connection with trouble and suffering. We believe that God is good; and our faith, implanted in His goodness, gives our soul a telescopic vision. What do I mean by that? I mean that, no matter what disaster falls upon a believer, no matter into what labyrinths his life errs, he lifts his head and, by the light of his faith, tries to see beyond the mist and gloom. Whatever trial we must endure, let us pause a moment and let our first word be: What does God want of us?

God, the good God, does not send it merely to give us pain. God, the good God, does not send it merely to make us weep. Why, then, does He send it? This question I will try to answer at a future occasion. Just now I simply quote a few lines from two letters. Both were written by persons who have been deeply shaken by the storms of life. But note well what was the end of the disasters that surged upon them.

In the first letter the writer says: "I did not go to church. Mass made no impression on me nor did sermons, either. But, when cares had crushed me and softened the soil of my soul, when through the maze of my own financial troubles I began to observe the world of suffering mankind, then, then the seeds of the broadcast sermons no longer fell by the wayside, but in fertile soil. . . . Now I view even our national misery quite differently. In that, too, I see the love of God, who wishes to awaken us from our indifference and show us the way of truth. I have now learnt to know our Lord's prayer in all its profundity and exaltation. It is the most beautiful and most unselfish prayer. Now I see that one can experiment with republican, communistic, or any other form of government—there will be no rest and no peace in the world until His kingdom comes."

The other letter was sent by a mother, who was baptized not more than six months before. Her only son died when he was twenty-two years of age. I think I need not describe what that mother felt beside the coffin of her only son. But listen to what she writes:

"Perhaps I would never have asked to be baptized, had not a very sad circumstance altered my life. Nine years ago I became a widow, and two and a half years ago I lost my only son, then in his twenty-second year. He was not a spoilt child, but, in spite of his mere twenty-two years, an industrious, serious man. A boy such as you would like, pure in heart and soul, who never spent his time in cafés, who did not smoke cigarettes, but worked and studied, and kept his serene joyous nature in spite of all his earnestness: the idea of 'mother' was sacred to him. And that night, when I remained alone, I was not desolate, for there came to me One to whom I—though I was a Jewess—had entrusted my boy, body and soul, with all the confidence of my heart, One who was with us in all our ways and who has not forsaken us now—Jesue. . . . And now I know that I received Christ in exchange for my child." Brethren can we find a more thoroughly Christian explanation of disaster than that? "Now I know that I received Christ in exchange for my child."

Thou, good God, help me that I may be good. Thou, good God, help me so to live that I may rejoice in Thy goodness, and have no cause to fear Thy righteous judgment.

Thou, good God, if Thou chastisest me, help me to perceive Thy holy will, to perceive it and to say with a truly humble heart:

"I open Thy Book at the Prayer,
It goes the weary way with me,
Thy words, O Lord, changing all grief

To glad rejoicing, make me free.
All sufferers have need of prayer
Whom Fate has left forlorn, each one.
My Savior, I will not complain,
But humbly say: Thy will be done." Amen.

—Reviczky.

X

GOD AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Today I intend to discuss the subject which has tormented and harassed many hearts since man has existed in this world. At least, if we read the seventy-second Psalm from the Book of Psalms, which is nearly three thousand years old, we feel emanating from it the struggle of a soul seeking the right path. Listen to a few verses.

“My feet were almost moved; my steps had well-nigh slipped,
Because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners.
For there is no regard to their death, nor is there strength in their stripes.
They are not in the labor of men; neither shall they be scourged like other men.
Therefore pride hath held them fast: they are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness.
Their iniquity hath come forth, as it were from fatness: they have passed into the affection of the heart.
They have thought and spoken wickedness: they have spoken iniquity on high.
They have set their mouth against heaven: and their tongue hath passed through the earth.
Therefore will my people return here: and full days shall be found in them.
And they said: How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the most High?
Behold these are sinners; and yet abounding in the world they have obtained riches.

And I said: Then have I in vain justified my heart: and washed my hands among the innocent.
And I have been scourged all the day; and my chastisement hath been in the mornings."

Thus the man of three thousand years ago laments, and even today this is our weighty problem. God is good, infinitely good. But if He is good, how can He pass over without a word all the trouble and evil which envelop with a foul scum the earth, and on it all mankind? How much evil, shame, sin, and contamination! And has the good God no word to say to this? How many cruel disasters, how much pain and suffering! And can God look upon these complacently?

If God is good, how can He overlook so much evil, how can He allow it to be in the world: moral evil, that is, sin and wickedness, and physical evil, that is, disasters, suffering, pain? The world is full of sin and suffering; the world which we avow God governs. How can we reconcile these two things? This is the difficult problem of today's sermon.

Let us take the first question, the question of moral evil. How can God overlook this immense amount of sin? Why is God silent even when it seems that the foul waves of evil must beat against high heaven itself?

Before anything else, I should like to refer to what I have already said about the holy God. We considered how much God is offended by sin, how it grieves Him; that is, how much He wishes no sin to be in the world. We must keep this thought before us during our reflections today, for only by its light can we find the answer to the question propounded.

If God is so grieved by sin, yet is silent, and still overlooks the fact that man sins, if He does not prevent sin

and make it impossible by His continual intervention, then there must be some very great reason for this.

i) The first reason is respect for human free will, man's nature. God created man with a priceless gift, free will, that he should not be under ironclad laws as are all other created things in this world, but that he should reach the goal which God has set him, everlasting life, and deserve this by the co-operation of his determination and free will. God does not want fettered slaves, or men driven to Him by lightning, earthquakes, floods, fire, and the horrors of war, but those who freely render homage to Him, and freely worship Him. To this end man was created with that sublime prerogative, free will.

But the human will is not merely our lofty privilege, it is our responsibility and can even be fraught with danger. A wonderful honor for man, but at the same time a terrible peril, too. We are men; then all the tyrants in the world cannot force our consent to something we do not wish to do. This is man's charter of nobility, free will. We are not compelled to do evil, for in that case there would be no sin in this world; and we are not compelled to do good, either, for then there would be no virtue, no merit. God does not wish us to abuse our will and sink our manly dignity to the level of the beasts by choosing evil. And that we should not do this, He stands by us with abundant helpful grace and clemency. Notwithstanding this, man can become obdurate, and here is the source of evil.

Sin was unknown in the beginning; God did not create evil, sin. Man marred his earthly life when he opposed his will to God's will. Man abused his greatest privilege, which pre-eminently lifts him above every other earthly creature—his free will. Here you have the first answer: sin is in the world; but it is not God who created it or wished it; this has been done by man.

Free will can be abused, we can sin with it; but, for

this sinning, God is not responsible. Suppose I teach my pupils many useful things. Am I responsible if in later life they use their knowledge for evil?

Yet how much human suffering originates thus? How much trouble is caused by man alone? How many of the lame, the blind, the sickly, and the nervously weak would have been born healthy if some ancestor had not lived an immoral, dissolute life full of revelry and debauchery and had not sinned against the precept of purity in his youth? If we could only eliminate all the bitterness, unhappiness, robbery, murder, and war which man occasions to man, how much easier life would be? Truly, we cannot make God responsible for all this.

"But," you say, "if God really does not wish man to be vicious, if our depravity grieves Him, the Almighty God could prevent man's sinning, could He not?" Yes, He wishes to prevent sin, He also gives helpful grace to oppose it, but He does not use force, He does not break man's free will with violence; for He respects what He Himself created in us, He respects our manhood.

2) Then does God look on sin inactive? O no. God does not take away from us our free will, which belongs to our nature, which is our sacred privilege. And with human free will is connected the fact that sin will be in the world as long as man exists. However, God seizes sin and wishes to bring forth good even from evil.

Who comprehends this? He who looks back upon life when he has become gray-headed, or one who has studied history extensively. Often it has happened in the past and still happens that men, following their own petty, sordid aims, or perhaps acting wickedly, even in these ways, without their being aware, they are helping God's plans forward. Many people can say in later life to their enemies and to those who plotted against them, the words which Joseph, who was sold to the Egyptians, said to his

brothers years later: "You thought evil against me: but God turned it into good" (Gen. 50:20).

Hardly has Jesus ascended to heaven, when the Jews seek His followers, to kill them. But God brings forth good even from evil. The Christians, fleeing in all directions from this persecution, carry the doctrines of Christianity to all parts of the world, even as the storm which shakes and bends the trees, at the same time scatters their seeds, thus becoming the propagator of new forests.

God's wish, then, is truly that men should not use the will they have received from Him, for evil. If, however, they use it for evil and act sinfully, God strives to bring forth good from the evil.

3) Of course, this is still not a satisfactory answer to the question we are considering: Why is God silent? For life is so full of atrocities of human depravity that even the devout shudderingly exclaim: "Dear God, how canst Thou keep silent now? Canst Thou overlook this, too?"

Let us consider why God is silent, even when we might be tempted to exclaim: "Lord, only one word. Only one flash of lightning. Only send an earthquake to swallow up these monstrous sinners."

God is silent, for He has no need of speech. What He found necessary to say to us that we might know Him, know His thoughts, His plans, and His commands, so much He has told us in the past by His prophets, and by His only-begotten Son; and He still proclaims it by Holy Writ and Holy Mother Church.

He is silent, for the eternal God has time. His mills grind slowly, but very surely. Who can flee from Him? And should they wish to do so, sooner or later in any case they run into His arms.

God is silent, for He has an envoy who once, at some time, touches every one of us on the shoulder, and then takes us before the Lord. Then the Lord will cease to be

silent: "Man, thus far I have been silent, I was still. Now be thou silent and hear judgment from the mouth of the Lord thy God,"

Yes, brethren, we know not how to reconcile the awful wickedness of man with the goodness of God, unless we remember that God is not only good, but a just and strict Judge also, before whose judgment-seat every person will stand, with all his evil deeds.

This thought leads us to the solution of the other question propounded for our consideration. Until now we have spoken of human sinning and of the sufferings we have to endure because of man's depravity. True, the viciousness of men causes a great part of human suffering, but not all. There are troubles, diseases, calamities of which men are not the cause. How can we reconcile these with the goodness of God? This is the question we must now consider.

π

THE GOOD GOD AND SUFFERING

"The Lord is just in all His ways, and holy in all His works," sings the Psalmist (Ps. 144:17). But does not experience deny this? Does not all the amount of trouble and disaster refute this, causing men to lament unceasingly? The farmer complains that the harvest is scant; the poor man, that the cold of winter numbs him; the invalid, that his pains are unbearable; the child, that he has not enough clothes; the youth, that he cannot find employment; the old, that they must die. Nothing but lamenting, nothing but tears; from the cradle to the grave, nothing but woe.

Moreover, what terrible happenings! A theater catches fire, and seventy children are burnt to death: think of the awful sorrow of those seventy mothers. Dynamite explodes in a German coal mine, and nearly three hundred

men are killed. A landslide occurs at Lyons in France, and whole streets are buried beneath it. Collisions, explosions, and countless other accidents are recorded every day in the newspapers. Brethren, how can we give a satisfactory, tranquillizing answer to this?

How many people suffer unjustly? How many people fail in spite of their hard work? How many are misunderstood and unlawfully persecuted? How many invalids and cripples suffer through no fault of their own? What shall we say to all this? What will our answer be?

1) Our first answer will be: All this trouble and unhappiness—what we call, in a word, physical evil—exists because this world is finite, limited, still in process of development, and constantly changing. Everything begins, develops, and grows old in this world, and this continual mutation is combined with a vast amount of trouble.

How shall I express myself more clearly? With the world trouble goes hand in hand. Not only the life of an infant costs its mother pain, but all life in this world originates in pain. "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24, 25).

2) Furthermore, man's life on this earth is framed by physical laws. These laws are also of God's creating, hence their validity glorifies God, too; glorifies Him, even if in their train perhaps some human heart becomes oppressed. Someone goes skiing, he stumbles: the law of gravity is effective here, too; he falls, sprains his ankle or perhaps is crippled for life. A tile becomes loose on a roof; the force of gravity brings it crashing to the ground. If your little son happens to be playing just at that spot, he is killed by it, and two parents are heart-broken. God could, by particular intervention, catch the falling tile, or cause it to deviate from its course. But, I ask, can we reasonably expect this of God? If God were constantly to intervene in the order of the world, as often as the enforcement of

physical laws became dangerous or unpleasant to man, would not this order soon become disorder, a great uncertainty, where one would never know what to expect? God could also forcibly prevent evil-doers from sinning; but would not this world become a stage of puppets with figures pulled by wires, where men no longer glorify God and pay homage to Him of their own free will?

3) However, all this is not yet a satisfactory solution. We find a satisfactory solution of disaster only if we look upward, if we lift our eyes to God and, instead of confining our view to the narrow limits of this earthly life, measure the disasters which have befallen us by the horizons of eternal life. Then, and only then, shall we not fall dizzy into trouble.

A small ship-boy became dizzy on his first voyage. "Boy," said the captain, "are you a good climber?" "Yes," answered the boy proudly; "I have climbed the highest trees in the woods at home." But when he was at the top of the mast, with the vessel rolling from side to side, the lad began to feel giddy; he trembled and was afraid he would fall. The captain was watching his every movement from below and, when he saw the boy's frightened, despairing face, he shouted: "Look upward, only upward." The boy obeyed. He looked upward, and at once his dizziness passed off, and he was no longer afraid.

Yes, look only upward; then you will find support on life's tossing sea also. One who looks upward can answer the complaint heard thousands of times: Sinners are prosperous, but honest men are in misery in this world. Where, then, is the good God? Undoubtedly this is a tormenting problem. But it is unaccountable only to those who do not look upward, toward man's eternal destination beyond this world. One strong in the belief that this earthly life is not man's final and only goal, one who knows that the mass of injustice in this earthly life will all be dissolved into perfect harmony at judgment day

by the eternal Judge, such a man is not disturbed by the unjust division of earthly happiness.

One who looks upward will not lament thus: Why must it happen to me? Why must I suffer, why must I struggle with misery, and others not?

Others not? You cannot see into the depths of other lives. Persian rugs, a twelve-roomed apartment, an automobile, evening parties; but do you think no sorrows, trials, and temptations are there, no sick child, no human caprices, no anguish, clouds, storms? Is there a rose without a thorn? Is there sunshine without shadow? Are there any human eyes without tears?

You say you are poor. Having but little money, is not being poor. He is poor who has many desires. There are people who eat from tin plates, and they are as happy as if they ate from silver; and there are others who sit at tables laden with silver, but who are much more wretched than many who eat from tin plates.

Have you never heard of great earthly possessions being the cause of the ruin and corruption of earthly life? Quintus Curtius mentions young Alexander the Great, commending him for his fine treatment of the captured mother, wife, and two daughters of his enemy, the Persian king. And the historian immediately remarks that "at this time good fortune had not corrupted the conqueror's heart, but he could not bear good fortune permanently," and his cruel, immoral life brought him to an early grave. (*De reb. gest., Alex. M.*, iii, 12.)

On the other hand, how many people, who had entirely forgotten God before, have been led to Him by suffering and cross-bearing? Simon of Cyrene was also bowed down by earthly cares; he was carrying wood to his home in Jerusalem. All at once he sees a procession coming toward him: the Lord Jesus is bearing His heavy cross to Calvary. The Roman soldiers make Simon stop, and compel him to help Christ carry the cross. He did not do this gladly;

the Scripture says: "They forced him." But behold, this cross was the turning point in his life. O blessed cross!

At the close of my previous sermon I read two letters from two deeply afflicted people, who were led back to God just by suffering. Now only one question: Are there not among you hundreds, even thousands, who might have written exactly the same letters? Thousands who could say: "I was far from God, very far. I had strayed far in wrong paths; thanks be to Him, that with His afflicting, chastening holy hand, He brought me back to His side." Oh, God is good. Yes, God is good.

Have I now solved every riddle? Are all our oppressing problems now settled? By no means. Far from it. Who can give a satisfactory answer to this one? It is one of the weightiest problems of our religion. On the one hand I look at the world and see so much beauty, greatness, order, purpose, and plan in it, that I have no right to become faithless; but on the other hand, so many dark, unsolved riddles are forced upon my notice, that I must say: I do not know, I cannot answer. Only Thou canst answer, Thou, Almighty God, who sittest at the weaving-loom of history.

What is life? One says, comedy; another, tragedy. He who considers it a comedy, will have a tragic fate; for the one who thinks it a tragedy, his rôle will be comical. Then, what is life? A mystery, a secret, and to its awful questions we try to find answers, we seek the way out, but often our only answer is found in the poet's words:

. But halt here on my lips, Word.
The acts of God are surely well planned,
The blind man does not see into His high schemes,
We may not call Him then to give account."

I believe in the benign heart of God, who directs the destiny of the world.

Dear brethren, through the whole universe the harmony of a wonderful accord resounds. It is true that here and there a dissonant note shrilly makes itself heard, but it cannot spoil the work of the great Composer. Talented musicians can allow the calmly flowing course of harmony to be interrupted suddenly by discord, but the audience does not become impatient, or give vent to dissatisfied criticism, but waits quietly, awaits the end, when under the master-hand all dissonance resolves itself into one final perfect harmony. Thus my Christian soul awaits the final harmonizing of the discords of this earthly life in the glorious pæan of praise that will resound in eternity before the throne of God, who directs the course of the whole world.

Lastly, we cannot do better than turn once more to the seventy-second Psalm. At the beginning of this sermon I read the first verses, in which the Psalmist struggles with the problem of the good God and the evil-doer. Now I will read the end of the Psalm, the solution:

“ . . . and I am always with Thee.

Thou hast held me by my right hand, and by Thy will
Thou hast conducted me: and with Thy glory Thou
hast received me.

For what have I in heaven? And besides Thee what do I
desire upon earth?

For Thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away: Thou
art the God of my heart, and the God that is my por-
tion forever.

For behold they that go far from Thee shall perish: Thou
hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to Thee.

But it is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope
in the Lord God:

That I may declare all Thy praises.” Amen.

XI

THE TRUTHFULNESS OF GOD

On the blessed face of our heavenly Father there are features to which the human tongue gives separate names. Of two such features of God's face I should like to speak today: they are two in name only; in reality they are one.

My sermon will treat of the truthful and faithful God. The subject is only seemingly twofold, for truthfulness and faithfulness in God are inseparable from each other, even as light and heat are inseparable in the sunbeam. If we think of God's words, we say God is truthful; if we refer to His acts, we say He is faithful; but, properly speaking, these are merely two aspects of one truth.

God loves truth in speech, and therefore we call Him truthful. He also loves truth in deed, and therefore we call Him faithful. Who is truthful? Anyone whose words agree with his thoughts. And who is faithful? Anyone whose deeds are consistent with his words.

But is God in reality truthful and faithful? The Holy Scriptures give answer. In the pages of the Old Testament, God's truthfulness and faithfulness are spoken of with the greatest piety and reverence. "God is an eternal rock," writes Isaiah (Is. 26:4, according to the Hebrew original). It is as though the prophet were to say: The restless, changing stream of life seethes and surges round us; only God is firm. God is a rock. But even rocks crumble, time and the sea-waves break them. But God is "the eternal rock" to whom man can cling with perfect trust; because, as the same prophet writes: "The word of our Lord endureth forever" (Is. 40:8).

The Lord Jesus repeats this last thought still more

solemnly in His sublime words of the Gospel: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away" (Mark 13:31). And St. Paul writes: "God is true; and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). Simply "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18).

Certainly God is truthful and God is faithful. To what does God's truthfulness oblige us and how does His faithfulness comfort us? In these two questions I would sum up the thoughts of today's sermon.

TO WHAT DOES GOD'S TRUTHFULNESS OBLIGE US?

1) Before all else it obliges us to believe God's words without reserve. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), says our Lord. Hence God is truth itself, and my whole faith is founded upon my belief in the word of the truthful God. Our holy religion repeatedly emphasizes the importance of a faith, a mighty faith, that knows no doubt. There are many things in our religion which we do not thoroughly understand, yet we must believe them. Why must we believe? Why may we not doubt? Because we cannot doubt the word of the truthful God. Hence the first and strongest basis of our faith: We do not understand how this is, but we believe. We believe, for the truthful God cannot lead us into error.

Only God cannot err. We human beings, even with the best intentions, are often mistaken. When, therefore, doubts assail us concerning our religion, and when they try to gnaw their way into our consciousness like worms into a rosy apple,—no one is secure from such dark days—it is reassuring to say: True, we do not understand the full meaning of this or that in our religion; but God said it, and we believe Him. "I know whom I have believed, and I am certain" (II Tim. 1:12).

We stand in a valley; God is on a mountain. He stands

on a mountain and tells us what is beyond the mountain, in the next world, which we cannot see because of the mountain. We believe His word, for He is truthful.

2) But God's truthfulness and His love of truth impose another duty upon us. That God is truthful implies not only that we must believe His word under all circumstances, but also that His essence is opposed to every lie, that He abhors a lie, and that, if we wish to resemble Him, we must avoid lying, too.

a) A lie is so opposed to God's nature that, if the smallest shadow of a lie were in Him, in that moment He would cease to be God. Then how can God bear to look upon a liar?

"God is light," says Holy Writ, "and in Him there is no darkness" (1 John 1:5). If there is none in Him, He certainly will not tolerate it in us. What does it profit a man if he lies? He can deceive his fellow-men, but not God. What a ridiculous figure man must be, when he stands decked out in falsities before God, who sees all, sees through all, and sees into every heart! If a dirty, dust-covered windowpane could speak and were to say to the sun: "See what a beautiful Venetian mirror I am," we might suppose the sunbeam would laughingly reply: "Why do you exaggerate? I can see through you." And if a rain-puddle were to say: "See what a crystal-clear mountain lake I am," the sun, with a smile, might say: "Why do you exaggerate? I can see all the dirt in you."

Brethren, God's eye sees through us better than the sun through the windowpane, and sees into us better than the sun into the depths of the water.

b) "Well," people excuse themselves, "I'm not in the habit of lying. At any rate, not so as to harm other people. That would be despicable. But, you know, just innocent little lies, a little fibbing, a little exaggeration, a little conventional deception, a little swaggering, a little suppression, a little boasting, a little enlarging upon the facts.

Such things one really cannot avoid. I never harm anyone by that. Tell me, please, why is a lie a sin if I harm no one by it?"

I will tell you. Because there is no such lie. How do I mean that? There is not any lie that is innocent and harms no one. Such lies do not exist. If a lie does not harm anyone else, it quite certainly harms the liar himself.

Now, how are we to explain this? According to our Lord's command, we all must strive to imitate our heavenly Father in spiritual perfection (Mark 5:48); then, in love of truth, in truthfulness, and in straightforwardness.

The truth bears a divine sign upon its brow, and anyone who intentionally sins against truth, sins against God also, even though not harming his fellow-men by the falsehood.

Thus we comprehend why St. Paul so seriously admonishes the Ephesian Christians, saying: "Put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth. Wherefore, putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbor" (Ephes. 4:24, 25).

Speak the truth. Why? Because every lie is a wall of separation between God and the soul, a distorted line which mars the divine likeness in man's spirit.

Brethren, venerate truth. The soul of a liar is inundated by a muddy wave. A person who has accustomed himself to lies and who lives with them, is like a man living in the Dead Sea—if we could suppose anyone living there; the corroding, stinging waters of falsehood eat their way into his soul and burn it to ruins.

Moreover, let us not forget that as we are in this life, so we shall be in eternity, too. Our souls will forever remain what we make of them here. The true and upright will shine like glistening diamonds; the false will be dark and gloomy like a hopelessly dark night.

3) I must not only become like unto God by keeping free from all falsehood. And by something more than this negative vindication, I must build up resemblance to God in my soul, build it up by flaming love of truth.

It is inexpressible happiness to be able to do something for truth, to make it known, to champion it, to help spread it abroad. If we possess an earnest desire to resemble the truthful God and if we have a deep love of truth, we can understand the enthusiasm of the ancient martyrs, who were able, in loyalty to the divine truth, to sacrifice their lives. The same may be said of the heroic missionaries of today who, imbued with the truth of our holy faith, renounce comfort and accept untold privations so as to spread this truth among the heathens. Other heroes there are who did not receive the gift of faith in their childhood but embraced our blessed religion when they grew up; in making a stand for their new-found faith, they have frequently undergone very great hardships. And the inventive, apostolic love of those zealous souls is not hard to understand: they cannot hide the blissful knowledge of the religious truth that has been made known to them in their hearts, but wish to procure this same bliss for as many others as possible.

Do you know what I am speaking of now? One of the most sacred joys, one of the happiest moments in a priest's life, when souls aflame with the fire of truth come to him and joyously announce: "Father I have a friend at the University who has been struggling with religious doubts all by himself; and now I have succeeded in persuading him to attend the sermons regularly: and I am so glad." And another comes: "Next to me a couple have been living together for twelve years without being validly married. After being urged for a long time, they were married yesterday in church: and I am so glad." And a third comes: "Do you remember the man that came to you in the sacristy last Sunday after the sermon, full

of spiritual distress? I encouraged him to go to you; now he is so grateful, and I am so glad." And a fourth comes: "I have a dear, good friend; we have been friends for years. And she is a very good woman, but she has not been to confession for years, not since her wedding, in fact, because she had all sorts of objections to confession; but at last I was able to convince her, and tomorrow she is going to confession, and I am so glad." Each one always ends by saying: "And I am so glad." Why glad? Where does this nameless happiness spring from? While each was helping another toward truth, his own soul became more and more like the true God, for religious truths are never so strengthened in our own souls as when we convince another of their genuineness. We wish to resemble the truth-loving, truth-radiating God.

If we have become like the truthful God, then we can also rely upon the promises of the faithful God. For God is not only truthful, but faithful, too. And if His truthfulness imposes many difficult tasks upon us, yet His faithfulness comforts us with many encouraging promises. This thought leads us to the second question.

II

HOW DOES GOD'S FAITHFULNESS COMFORT US?

i) First, it comforts us with the knowledge that there is in the world someone in whom we shall not be disappointed. God's faithfulness strengthens and solaces us with the assurance that, even if we have been disappointed by everything else in the world, even if everyone else has deceived us, even if we have become quite disillusioned, still we have one true friend, in whom we shall never be disappointed: the faithful God. God is a faithful Friend in whom we can never be disappointed.

"God is not a man," says Holy Writ, "that He should lie, nor as the son of man, that He should be changed.

Hath He said then, and will He not do? Hath lie spoken, and will He not fulfil?" (Num. 23:19.)

And in Isaias, God says: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Is. 49:»5).

Those who know human nature, will thoroughly understand what we mean by saying: God is a faithful Friend, in whom no one was ever disappointed. God is a faithful friend. Man indeed is not. Man is capricious, fastidious, inconstant, a slave to moods. Man is faithless. Many disappointed, forsaken, deceived, and plundered people will agree. It is so. Man is faithless.

Yet the heart of man is so fashioned that he thirsts for a faithful, trustworthy soul, where he may rest without fear of disappointment. And if, by rare good fortune, he finds such a one, it is certain that a ray of God's eternal faithfulness flames in that human heart. For without God there is no human faithfulness. There is interest, search for ease, quest for enjoyment; but not faithfulness.

2) From this flows the second solace. If God is faithful, then He keeps His word, then we can always build upon His word, and rely upon His promises. In one part of the Old Testament it is said of God, how lovingly He provides for His chosen people: "As the eagle enticing her young to fly and hovering over them, He spread His wings, and hath taken him and carried him on His shoulders" (Deut. 32:11). On our path leading to eternal life the truthfulness and faithfulness of God are the two wings that hover continually over us and encourage us, that we may not be dismayed.

If God is faithful, that is, if He keeps His every word, then His comforting promises are not the expiring brilliance of Bengal light, but life-giving absolute reality; hoping in them, we can safely trust ourselves among the numerous temptations of this earthly life.

What the faithful God promises, He also performs. Man is not omnipotent. Man forgets, or does not see or hear properly. Thus it can happen that, in spite of his best intentions, he may be mistaken in word and deed. But God does not forget; nor is He short-sighted or deaf. That means we can rely upon His promises.

We can rely upon them even in suffering. The weight of terrible disasters falls upon us, but we recall God's words: "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17). We can endure suffering only if we remember God's promise, that a place is awaiting us where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning nor crying nor sorrow shall be any more" (Apoc. 21:4).

What will eternal life be? We see God. But how blissful the sight of the infinitely good God will make us, if our happiest moments on this earth are those we spend in the gentle society of a really good man! Is any sacrifice too great if by it we can attain the highest Good? May we complain that it is very difficult steadfastly to obey God's commands in the world of today, when we know that by our faithful steadfastness we shall gain the highest Good forever? We shall assuredly gain it, for God is faithful. "And thou shalt know that the Lord thy God, He is a strong and faithful God" (Deut. 7:9).

3) However, God's faithfulness has yet another corollary, which I must not pass over. If God is in truth faithful, keeping His word and fulfilling His promises, then He also fulfils His threats. Then the judgment of the world, spoken of by our Lord, will some time really be.

People promise easily, and still more easily break their promises; they threaten easily, yet it is not in their power to fulfil their threats. But, as the Scripture tells us, "the Lord is the true God: He is the living God and the ever-

lasting King. At His wrath the earth shall tremble" (Jer. 10:10). And there is only one way by which we may escape the fulfilment of God's threats: by being faithful to Him, faithful in obeying His commandments.

It is the more necessary that I speak of this, the more we all feel how greatly we are tried by the hundred and one worries and temptations of this earthly life, that often weaken our fidelity to God.

So often we lament that people have deceived us, that they have been faithless to us, that we have been disillusioned by them. Do not let us murmur against them, rather let us recall how often we have been wanting in fidelity to the eternally faithful God, how often we have not fulfilled our promises. Let us call to mind our many confessions in which we promised God anew fidelity and improvement. And what became of our promises? The many resolutions to avoid sin. And what became of all our good intentions? Dear Lord, faithful God, fan the sacred flame of faithfulness in our souls.

In the city park at Budapest in Hungary, is a beautiful statue of the notary of King Bela IV. Interesting historical particulars are recorded by his pen; but his person, even his name, is quite lost in oblivion. We do not know who he was. Therefore only these words are inscribed on his memorial: "*Anonymus gloriosissimi Belae regis notarius*" (Glorious King Bela's nameless notary). If only we knew how to be such a quiet, nameless little worker for the King of kings, for the faithful God.

Perhaps in such quietude, unperceived by anyone, but in faithfulness seen by God, we could spend our earthly life. We would listen to His every word, respond to His every merciful sign, and engrave upon the white tablet of our soul the blessed holy features of the face of our heavenly King. We would receive no statue for this upon earth, but we would receive that crown of eternal life which the truthful and faithful God has promised to

them that love Him (II Tim. 4:8). And we believe in that true and faithful God.

Dear brethren, I have spoken of the true and faithful God. And now in conclusion I recall a strange statement that I read somewhere. There is a pretty little blue flower, the emblem of faithfulness; its name is forget-me-not. Botanists, however, have noticed that the forget-me-not is slowly being exterminated from the earth.

It seems as if people faithful to God were also diminishing in number, as if they were dying out, and with them the warmth and kindness in this world, too. Therefore our whole life is becoming more and more desolate: for the more faithless man is to God, the colder and more unscrupulous he becomes to his fellow-men also. Where no goodness is to be found there can be no truth and fidelity, because fidelity and truthfulness are brethren; both are the offspring of goodness. But God is true; therefore we believe Him. God is faithful; therefore we hope in Him. God is good; therefore we love Him.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He is faithful that hath promised" (Heb. 10:23). These words of St. Paul ring in our hearts. This Christian hope infuses warmth in our soul even if the world around us is chill and frosty. Although everyone may deceive us, God cannot deceive us. Although everyone may forsake us, God cannot forsake us. Although everyone may be faithless, God will not be; only let us not be faithless to Him. Let God's warning remain in our hearts always: "Be thou faithful until death: and I will give thee the crown of life" (Apoc. 2:10). Amen.

XII

THE OMNIPRESENT GOD

I once read an interesting and naive anecdote about a little boy. He had often seen his father telephone, watched him take up the receiver, and heard him say, before beginning a conversation: "Hello, hello. This is so-and-so speaking." One evening his father saw the little fellow kneel down at his bedside and begin his night prayers with: "Hello, hello, dear God. This is little Paul speaking. Our Father who art in heaven."

As we hear this, we may smile. What are we smiling at? The little fellow's simplicity? Telephoning to the Lord God, the Lord God who fills heaven and earth? The idea of calling up God who, according to Holy Writ, is higher than heaven and deeper than hell, whose measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea (Job 11:8-9), whom heaven and the heavens of heavens cannot contain (111 Kings 8:27), who "reacheth therefore from end to end mightily and ordereth all things sweetly" (Wis. 8:1)? Well, certainly, this is simplicity, a childish way of thinking. We well know that God is everywhere present, that heaven and earth are filled by Him, that there is no smallest hidden spot in this world or in the sun or in any immense distance beyond the stars, where God is not, where one can hide from Him. As we know, God can be measured only by one measure, and that is infinity; He has only one boundary, and that is Himself. We know that whatever exists in the world is all brought into being by His act; therefore where anything whatever is, there God must be, too.

Yes, we well know this, we avow all this in our religion;

but I wonder if we realize this belief and order our lives in accordance with it? Do we not often act, often speak, and often think as if God were far, far distant from us, somewhere at the end of the earth? If we correctly consider the omnipresent God, we will derive splendid lessons and consequences for use in our own lives. To make these lessons quite plain, is the task of today's sermon.

First, then, let us endeavor rightly to picture to ourselves that God is everywhere present; then to consider what a power this belief of ours is for us in temptation, and what encouragement it gives in time of suffering.

GOD IS EVERYWHERE PRESENT

First of all we must examine a little more closely how we are to understand correctly that God is everywhere present.

1) Our first question is: Can we imagine God being everywhere? With our limited thinking abilities certainly not. At most we come nearer to understanding if we think of our soul as it is present in our body. It is there in all our members, in its indivisibility; it operates everywhere, and we can find no place of which we could say it is only there.

A little child presses itself to its mother's bosom, and asks wide-eyed: Mother where does God live? The mother looks toward the heavens: There, my child, in the high, star-filled sky.

Now adults stand before me and ask: Where is God? And I can give them no better answer than by saying: Look round you at the whole world, and you will find God everywhere.

In the starry skies millions of stupendous heavenly bodies move. Who projected them with titanic force? Who lays the invisible rails of their course? But especially who

prescribes the laws that for billions of years have raised the mass of matter and forces which we call the world, in continual development, higher and higher? The omnipresent, glorious God.

2) Now comes our second statement: God is in the whole world, but God is greater than the world. "Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" (Jcr. 23:24.) God is greater than heaven and earth; the entire world is not large enough to contain Him. God is so great that for Him only He Himself is sufficient.

Then it is more correct, instead of saying God is in the whole world, to say that the whole world is in God. How beautifully St. Paul expresses this thought before the Greek philosophers in the Areopagus at Athens! "God, who made the world and all things therein; He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is He served with men's hands, as though He needed anything; seeing it is He who giveth to all life and breath and all things. . . . For in Him we live and move and are" (Acts 17:24, 25, 28).

Magnificent words: "In God we live and move and are." Then God is not in us, but we in Him. Not the Great in the lesser, but the lesser in the Great. Not the Infinite in the finite, but the finite in the Infinite. God is in everything as roots are in a plant, as the soul is in the body. And he that would break away from God, could only do so if he could create an absolutely new world for himself.

"In Him we live and move and are," that is, all being is in God, and God is in all being. Understand me rightly; here the smallest word is important. We do not say all being is God—this is the mistake of the pantheists—but that there is nothing in the world, no mountain-peak, rivulet, sea, song of bird, or heart of man without God being behind it, as a fruit is behind the rind, a face behind a veil.

"Tell me, O God, where could I find
In the whole world some such spot,
Some blade of grass, some insect small,
Where Thou, Lord God, Thou art not.
It is as if Thou smilest down
From the blue skies above me,
In the scent of lovely flowers
Thy holy breath seems to be."

To see God through the veil of materiality is the privilege of fervent, religious souls. St. Paul speaking of God, says: "The invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. 1:20).

What a grand thought! God is everywhere. When a comet rushes across the calm, starlit heavens, when a dry leaf rustles under your foot on the silent heath, when you walk through flowery meadows in solitary reflection, remember that God is there. For thousands of years stalactites have been forming in hidden caverns within high mountains; unnoticed by anyone, the jewel crystallizes in the depths of the earth. Remember that God is there. When in the silence of a still night a mysterious tenderness takes possession of your soul, when the feeling of loneliness overwhelms you, when, deceived by everybody, forsaken by everyone, you sit weeping on the side of your bed through a sleepless night, remember that God is there. You are not capable of being in two separate places at the same time. But God is not thus bound to one place. He cannot be limited; He is everywhere.

3) However, those who know the Scriptures well would now like to interrupt, to interrupt and say: There are certain passages in Holy Writ that seem to contradict what you have just said. Certainly the Scriptures tell us that God is everywhere present. But again, at other times they say that heaven is the throne of God (Matt. 5:34),

and the Lord Jesus prayed: "Our Father, who art in heaven" (Matt. 6:9), consequently God is in heaven. According to Psalm 131, God is in the church. Again, according to other words of our Lord, God is in those who keep His word (John 14:23). Then how are we to explain these passages if God is everywhere? And how are we to understand what Holy Writ says, namely, that God appears in answer to the prayer of a suppliant, but departs from the sinful soul? Further, how can we say that some evil-doer has quite abandoned God? The seventy-second Psalm, addressing God, says: "They that go far from Thee shall perish." But can anyone go far from God, can anyone forsake God if He is everywhere present?

Of a truth, we cannot. Neither this human expression nor the passages in Scripture can be so understood as if God were not present in every place. Truly, God is everywhere present, but there are places where His presence is much more conspicuous, much more palpable, where we seem to feel His presence much more distinctly, where we feel it in the more obvious results of His activity. The human soul is also present throughout the whole body; yet, if anyone is very enthusiastic about something, do we not rightly say: "See! His whole soul is in his face; in his eyes his whole soul is flaming." God, as infinite Being, is truly everywhere present, but His grace and His words do not always fall upon fertile soil.

In the Church and in the souls of the righteous this presence becomes, as it were, perceptible in consequence of the working of grace; on the other hand we say of a sinful soul, "he has departed from God," not as if one could break away from God or depart from Him but because the grace of God cannot work in him. Space does not divide us from God or bring us nearer to Him; we approach Him if our souls resemble Him, and we depart from Him if our souls are different. Just this shows God's greatness and liberty, that, although He is in every place

and must be so, yet in some places He is especially able to do His will. And of such places we say: "Here God dwells."

Thus we understand correctly that God is everywhere present. And from this understanding there springs a plenteous well of fortifying and solacing energies. The thought, "God is omnipresent," is a mighty source of strength in temptation and of great consolation in suffering.

II

STRENGTH IN TEMPTATION

How often does sin whisper furtively in our ears: "What are you afraid of? Why do you hesitate? Courage, go on, no one sees you; there is no one here. The cash-box is open now; courage, there is no one here. It is dark now; courage, there is no one here. You two are alone now behind locked doors; courage, there is no one here. Is it true no one is there? Is it true no one sees?"

Railroad managers are much concerned that their officials should be most trustworthy; therefore they have them observed by separate corps of detectives. One time a railroad man asked for leave of absence on account of a death in his family. When he returned to work, his chief showed him a photograph in which he was plainly to be seen, not in a funeral procession, but in a group of merry-makers. The detectives had photographed him. Foolish fellow. Had he known that his every step was being watched, that his movements were being photographed, how differently he would have behaved! God's eyes are sharper than the film of a camera. If the smallest object can be seen on a good film, how much more certainly the traces of our least deed of good or evil must be visible to God's eye!

What does Dante represent Virgil as saying in purga-

tory? "If you were to wear a hundred masks, your thoughts would not be unknown to me." As often as temptation whispers in your ear: "Courage, there is no one here," remember just the opposite is true: God is here. The Almighty God who created me is here. The holy God is here, who is infinitely grieved by sin. The just God is here, who will some day be my judge. Courage; no one sees you. On the contrary, we are seen by God always. We live in God as in the air that surrounds us, or as in the sunbeam that shines upon us. There is no thought of ours that He does not know: no single word of ours that is unheard by Him.

Courage, no one sees you. In front of Antigone's tent, Seneca writes, two sentinels were once speaking together, abusing Antigone. Suddenly Antigone herself pulled aside the curtain and said to the startled soldiers: "At least go a little farther away, that I may not hear what you are saying." The material world is such a curtain between God and us. We cannot see God, it is true, but He can see us and hear us; and we cannot go farther away. Where can we go, where can we hide from God, when we want to act sinfully? There is no place where He is not. All our deeds and words, yes, even our intentions and secret thoughts are known to the Lord.

When we are at home alone in our room, and alluring temptation whispers deceitfully in our ear: "Courage, commit just this one sin; nobody sees you in any case," then let us say: "Lord, even if no one else sees me, at least Thou seest me here, and I will not be faithless to Thee."

When in quiet solitude the devouring fire of bodily desire stirs restlessly within us, let us kneel with bowed head and say: "Lord, Thou art here; Thou seest my hard struggle. Do not allow me to fall."

When we feel how greatly the Putiphars of today entice us, let us cry out as did Joseph in Egypt: "How can

I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God?" (Gen. 39:9.)

Thus we may be tempted to say, as it is written in Holy Writ: "Who seeth me? Darkness compasseth me about, and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me. Whom do I fear?" Then let us answer in the words of Scripture: "His eye seeth all things. . . . The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts" (Ecclus. 23:25-28).

Happy the man who can feel God everywhere, who can see the trace of His hand in everything! Happy the youths who become accustomed to the thought that wherever they are, they are under God's eye! In school or college, during the lectures on science, between explanations of physical laws or in the course of the consideration of the marvelous machinery of the universe, if the professor were now and then to mention the Creator, such comment ought to be no more than we should expect.

In other cases we find this quite natural. In the school-room no competent teacher would analyze the works of a great writer without making known the life and individuality of the author. This belongs to successful teaching. Only he can understand Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, or interpret the works of Mozart, Schubert, or Haydn with real feeling, who knows the life and struggles and yearnings of the composers. Would it not be quite fitting if, while the wonders of creation were being made known, a few words were said about God the Creator, who fills the world, and holds everything in His hand? In this way the educational value of the schools would become much greater. One who is constantly imbued with the thought that he is seen by God, that he thinks, speaks, and acts in God's presence, receives great strength to resist temptation.

III

ENCOURAGEMENT IN SUFFERING

However, only half my task would be completed were I to stop at the thought that, because God is everywhere present, I must not dare to sin. From the fact that God is omnipresent we learn that we must be strong in face of temptation, and we also receive another edifying, comforting thought: since God is everywhere present, then in suffering we are never alone, never forsaken.

1) "Our Father, who art in heaven," we pray in every trouble, in all our struggles, in every disaster. But now we shall understand aright, shall we not? In heaven. Oh, how far off heaven is! Some think, so far away that we cannot measure the distance by miles, we have to calculate it by light years. And how many such light years are necessary before we reach even the Milky Way, which is relatively near us! "And is God there?" struggling mankind might ask, startled. "So far distant from us? Of what avail is God to us, then?"

Brethren, that is a very astronomical way of thinking. Where is heaven? "Up above," we say, and know nothing more; but those who live on the other side of the world also say: "Up above," when that means "down below" for us. With geography and astronomy we cannot determine God's place. But we can fare much better by a single short sentence of Holy Writ: "He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and are."

A breath-taking sentence, a startling doctrine. A fish lives in the water: that is its element. A bird lives in the air: that is its element. The rose, the lily live in the sun-beam: that is their element. And man? Man lives in God: that is his element. If there is no God, we do not exist, either.

Even as the water envelops the fish, the air encompasses the bird, and the sunshine bathes the rose, so we are enveloped by, surrounded by, and bathed in God. In Him we live and move and are.

2) "What do you mean?" laments the sufferer. "If I could only once feel that God really thus envelops me, that I truly live in God! If I could only feel that!"

Brother, how do you want to feel this? Is it with your material body that you expect to feel the spiritual God? There are some who want it that way. These are the ones that walk on marsh-land, the theosophists and anthropologists who talk about an astral body besides the material one. They wish to feel God, to touch Him directly with these; but they become the victims of hallucinations, or pay dearly by losing their reason.

Then can we not feel the nearness of God? We can. When you sit at your desk or table, laboring over some complicated documents, and your wearied mind is hardly able to concentrate, raise your head and whisper into the air—into the air? Oh, no . . . whisper to God, who is beside you: "Lord, my God, I know Thou art here, and art mine and I am Thine." Only just that. What a simple prayer; and what sublime strength wells forth from it! When some disaster threatens, or you are sorrowful and your soul is filled with anxiety, merely say: "My Lord, Thou art here with me, Thou wilt not leave me."

When you are confronted by the need of making a difficult decision, only ask of God: "See Lord, this is what I want to do. Shall I cause Thee to rejoice by doing it? Yes. Give me Thy blessing." And if you would forgo every deed on which you feel that you cannot ask God's blessing, how different life would be!

When a painful illness confines you to your bed—you twist and turn feverishly, you awake, it is half-past one in the morning, everyone else is sleeping, your temples arc

throbbing—then say to our Lord: “Dear Lord, everyone is sleeping, everyone has left me, but Thou art with me, Thou art here beside me.”

And when you are harassed by the memory of old sins, sins you committed in your foolish youth and that you have confessed, but that still leave you no peace, then you may say: “My Lord, Thou art here, Thou now seest how different I wish to be from what I was. Thy prodigal son prays: Forgive us our trespasses.”

Do you now understand what this belief signifies: God is always everywhere, we are always and everywhere in God? We are in God; even when it seems as though He were a hundred thousand miles away from us. Sometimes the path of our spiritual life leads over dry and arid tracts. Sometimes there are days, months, even years in our lives, when the dark clouds of abandonment and unconsolated grief seem to envelop our souls. The past is dreadful, the present hopeless. There is no one close at hand. Prayer is mechanical and cold. It is all as though God had forsaken us.

Now, brethren, now be alert, be faithful. Now be convinced that God is with us, for He is nearer to us than the clothes we wear, nearer than our shadow, which accompanies us, nearer than the air we breathe.

Once St. John Chrysostom was threatened by Empress Eudoxia with banishment because of his dauntless courage. The great bishop replied: “You could frighten me only if you could banish me to some place where God is not.” What strength this thought gives in every trial! Wherever you are, remember your heavenly Father is with you, God is with you. I believe in the ever-present heavenly Father.

With the naïve story of the little boy who telephoned to God, I began this sermon. I conclude it with the charming answer of another little child.

Frederick the Great called unannounced at a village

school in Brandenburg. A geography lesson was in progress, and the Emperor asked where their village was located.

"In Prussia," answered a boy.

"And where does Prussia lie?"

"In Europe."

"And Europe?"

"In the world."

"And where is the world situated?" was the Emperor's last question. The boy thought for a moment, then replied: "The world? In God's hand."

Oh yes, the whole world lies in God's hand. And the infinite majesty of this great God envelops us, covers us, conceals us, preserves us. This thought occupies our mind, our will, and our heart, fascinates us, and binds us to Him.

Even if we wished to, we could not hide from God. But in no case do we wish to. On the contrary, whatever trials we have to face, we will rather bow our head, our sorrowful head, in God's fatherly hands; we will lay our heart, our suffering heart, on God's fatherly heart, and then our life will again have a goal; for whosoever gives himself to God, receives himself from God again, receives his life and his love of work. Always and everywhere we absorb God; we throw open our heart and our soul: He is our all, our life-giving light. May this be so always: not one moment without Him, not one moment far from Him, not one moment in sin.

Father, who art always and everywhere present, grant that, by keeping Thy commandments always and everywhere, I may be Thine. Amen.

XIII

THE OMNISCIENT GOD

In Holy Scripture we read of the prophet Elias (III Kings, chap. 18), that he once became very embittered in his soul, when he noticed that his people were prone to the worship of idols. To disillusion them once and for all, he called the priests of the pagan god Baal to a singular contest.

Erect an altar to Baal, he said to the 450 prophets of the heathen god, and I will build an altar to the true God. You will lay your sacrifice on your altar, and I will lay my sacrifice on mine. Then it will be decided which is the true, the living God. On whichever altar fire descends from heaven, that is the altar of the true God; for this will signify that God has accepted the sacrifice.

All the people assembled. From dawn until noon the prophets of Baal leaped over the altar and called on the name of their god; but no answer came. At last Elias spoke to them at noon, saying: Cry with a louder voice, perhaps your god is talking to someone, or perhaps he is asleep. At this they cried still louder, and cut themselves until they were covered with blood—all in vain. No answer came. Then Elias began praying to the Lord, to the living God, the true God; and behold, immediately fire fell from heaven upon his altar, and the sacrifice was consumed by the fire. All the people at once fell upon their knees before the true God and called out: "The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God" (III Kings 18:39).

Truly, brethren, a speechless idol cannot be God, the true God cannot be a deaf, sleeping, senseless statue.

"They have mouths and speak not: they have eyes and see not. . . . They have hands and feel not, they have feet and walk not," says Psalm 113 mockingly of the heathen idols. The true God, on the contrary, has no hand, yet is omnipotent, has no feet, yet is omnipresent, has no eye, yet is omniscient. God is everywhere present, and He knows all things.

What does God know, what does He see? To these questions we seek answers in today's sermon.

WHAT DOES GOD KNOW?

Our first question is this: What does God know? We must confess at once that our answer is very primitive, of a general sort. What does God know? God knows everything, we reply. But what is that "everything"? Let us try to be more specific.

1) We first begin in a negative way. God knows all things, that is, there is nothing about which He can say: I do not know.

Often it happens that men, even the most learned, must say: We do not know. This is true even in the case of a man whom we might call the most learned in the world. Suppose we take him to the largest library in the country, with its more than a million books, and ask him how many thoughts are in those volumes, how many of their statements are true, and how many are false, and how many persons have read a certain book. He will answer; I do not know. Then let us take him to some height overlooking one of our populous cities and ask him what its million inhabitants are thinking at that moment, and what they will be doing tomorrow, at the same hour. Again he will answer: I do not know.

Put the cleverest man in the world on the seashore and ask him how many grains of sand are there, how many

drops of water are in the ocean, how many fish in the water, how many leaves on the trees, how many insects on the surface of the earth, how many birds in the air. The answer will always be: I do not know. What the cleverest man knows is only a grain of sand upon the seashore; what he does not know, is the ocean itself. But God knows all things. There is nothing about which He can say: I do not know.

2) Let us now examine more definitely, from the positive side also, what God knows. First, He knows Himself perfectly; He knows what He is and who He is.

He also knows perfectly everything that is outside Himself, even the most trifling and the most secret things. God knows the universe. "Who hath numbered the sand of the sea and the drops of rain and the days of the world? Who hath measured the height of heaven and the breadth of the earth and the depth of the abyss?" asks Holy Writ (Ecclus. 1:2). God knows man; according to Jeremias, He searches the heart and proves the reins (Jer. 17:10), that is, He knows all that we deliberate within our hearts.

Distance is no barrier to His knowledge. "Thou hast understood my thoughts afar off," says the Psalmist (Ps. 138:3). And time is no barrier. For again the Psalmist says: "Behold, O Lord, Thou hast known all things, the last and those of old" (Ps. 138:5).

In God is "the knowledge of all things" (Esther 14:14). "God knows everything," "knows all," "all knowledge is in Him," we say. But who understands, who is capable of perceiving the stupendous extent of the divine omniscience, intelligence, and wisdom?

How much knowledge was necessary merely to plan and bring to realization the marvelous machinery of the visible universe! The realm of the invisible active forces of the world, the geometric wonders of the crystals, the

splendor of millions of living creatures—these are all God's plan and knowledge.

And what of the soul of man? Take a child upon your knee, look into its eyes, and in their depths you will see its soul. Look well at the depths of this soul, and therein you will see God. The splendid elaboration, culture, and progress of the human mind is all a spark from God's knowledge, a gleaming ray of light from His omniscience.

Do we now see, in its complete extent, what God knows? Indeed not. When St. Paul pondered upon God's knowledge, the wondering exclamation rose to his lips: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!" (Rom. 11:33.) If the great St. Paul did not comprehend God's omniscience, we shall have to be satisfied with the vague, puzzling reply: What does God know? God knows all things.

3) "Everything is known to God?" someone asks.

"Yes, He knows eevrything."

"Then a dreadful thing follows. Something is very much the matter!"

"What is the matter?"

"If God knows everything beforehand, then He knows how I am going to live my earthly life. He knows whether I shall attain salvation or go to perdition."

"Yes, He knows."

"But in such case I have no longer any free will. I must do, must go, according to the knowledge God has of me in advance. God knows whether I shall be saved or shall be lost. But, if He knows this beforehand, I am exerting myself in vain; it is superfluous. And people rightly say, with despairing fatalism: That had to happen. It was written in the book of Fate."

Brethren, this is a difficult question, and I do not intend to evade it, because the relations of divine omniscience

to human free will have been a distressing problem for many earnest souls. It would be a terrifying prospect for us to think that our eternal destiny is determined beforehand, and that there is nothing we can do about it.

Would not every drop of our blood revolt against such a thought? Would it not lead us to deny God? Could we call the God who judges us beforehand, without hearing us, a just God? But, thank God, this is not the case.

a) Man is not omniscient, for he lives in time. He sees only the present moment, knows something of the past, and perhaps surmises a little of the future. But in the everlasting divine life there is no past and no future, only an eternal present. What we call future and do not yet see, God sees just as if it were the present. This divine perception, however, does not influence the history of coming events.

"That is quite incomprehensible," you say. But by an analogy it will become more intelligible. Imagine a sentinel high up in a tower, and imagine a great procession down below with yourself in the center of it. What do you see there? A few people in front of you, a few beside you, and a few behind you: that is all. Of the long procession you see virtually nothing. Just so much is your knowledge of the past, the present, and the future, too. But the sentinel at his high vantage point sees the whole procession; he sees what is far in front of you, the distant future; he sees what is far behind you, the distant past. The future, present, and past he sees all at the same time. He sees, but still he is not the cause of their happening in this or that way. God sees everything in this way, because He is over the world. And so St. Jerome rightly says: "Something happens, not because God knows it in advance; but, because it happens, He knows it" (In Jer., 26:3). Truly, God is all-knowing; with regard to me, He knows whether I shall attain salvation or be damned.

b) "But then our future is not in our own hands, after

all," we may say. But it is. And I ask: "How, then?" Because we do not know what God knows of us. If we also knew beforehand, such knowledge might indeed quench our martial spirit. But we do not know. Therefore we work, strive for the sake of our soul, struggle against sin. We wish to obtain salvation, and then God sees that in truth we are saved. We are saved, not because God sees this truth about us—that would be a disavowal of free will—but God sees this truth because, through our earnest struggles, aided by His grace, we shall certainly attain salvation.

To this, someone may say: "That is only a play upon words. "It will happen, not because God sees it, but He sees it because it will really happen": this is only a quibble instead of a serious answer."

This is not a play upon words, brethren. When the lightning flashes, we know for certain that it will thunder shortly. We are so certain about this, that some of us cover our ears beforehand. But I ask: Will the heavens thunder because we know it beforehand? No. We know it in advance because it will thunder.

c) Our whole human nature would rebel against the thought of such predestination. Yes, we see that those who avow this in theory, act quite differently in practice. Duns Scotus, one of the most able-minded theologians of the thirteenth century, on one of his journeys came upon a farmer in a field and spoke a few words of exhortation to him. The man answered in this way: "Why do you admonish me to live a good life? If God sees that I am saved, then I shall be saved anyway, whether I am good or wicked; if He sees that I am damned, then nothing can save me from it." Scotus replied gently: "Why do you sow here and labor so hard? If God sees beforehand that wheat will grow here, it will grow whether you sow or not: if He sees beforehand that there will be no wheat here well, there will not be any, however much you exert

yourself." And the farmer could find no answer to that; he went on with his sowing.

I do not contend that we are able to solve this problem completely; some of the best minds in Christendom have labored to find a solution, and yet something mysterious and incomprehensible remains. But we can grasp so much of it with our limited understanding that at least we are able to break off the sharp thorns from this problem, and calmly place our future, our life everlasting, in the blessed hands of the omniscient God.

God not only knows all things, but He sees all things, too; and this truth awakens a multitude of interesting, instructive thoughts within us.

II

WHAT DOES GOD SEE?

i) What does God see? I raise the question, and again our finite human language can give only a general answer. What does God see? you ask. Well, read what a school-boy wrote on his prayer-book:

"The eye of God is everywhere.
Do not steal this book of prayer."

What an interesting, almost instructive manifestation of the human soul! Holy Writ is full of thoughts, one more beautiful than the other, of the God who sees all things. "There is nothing hid from His eyes," we are told in one place (Ecclus. 39:24). In another place we read that God "beholdeth the ends of the world; and looketh on all things that are under heaven" (Job 28:24). There is a still more appropriate text in the Scriptures: "The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun" (Ecclus. 23:28). How many things the sun shines upon in the course of twenty-four hours: how many struggles, battles, mean-

nesses, sins, and villainies! But God's eye sees more than all this.

At the Mount Wilson Observatory in California there is a famous gigantic telescope, through which the surface of the moon can be photographed. They proudly call this "the eye of the world." Well, brethren, the true eye of the world is God's eye, which sees into the hidden places, into every secret, which sees even in the darkest night every deed and every thought.

If it is indeed true that the eye of God is everywhere, then there follows not only the warning, "Do not steal this book of prayer," but likewise a whole host of admonishing, encouraging and fortifying thoughts.

2) First, a solemn admonition follows: "Take care, you are in God's sight everywhere." The ancients had a special fondness for portraying God as an open eye in a triangle; the sides of the triangle denoted the three divine Persons; the open eye within it, the all-seeing Holy Trinity.

Wherever we are and whatever we do, God sees us. Had we never forgotten this, how many mistakes, how many bitter tears of repentance we should have been spared? If only God's warning would occur to us in every temptation: "Walk before Me, and be perfect" (Gen. 17:1). If only we were to remember the thought that gave Joseph in the house of Putiphar in Egypt the strength to resist every allurements: "How then can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God?" (Gen. 39:9.) Yes, we are always in God's sight.

When I am kneeling in the confessional and shame chokes my voice at thought of that great sin of mine, and I say to myself: "I dare not confess that," how well it is if I then remember that I can deceive this confessor, but I cannot deceive God, who knows all things and sees all? How well for me if I recall St. Augustine's words: "Do you wish to sin? Well, seek some place where God does

not see you; there do what you like." Seek such a place, if you can find it.

3) The thought of an all-seeing God is a solemn warning to the wicked; and it is just as great a consolation to the upright. It is no small consolation for us to reflect that God knows us well, and never misjudges us. Other people often misjudge us. Our holiest intentions are misconstrued. But the all-seeing God never misunderstands us.

God knows our whole being, our whole nature: He knows what we are capable of, what faults we ourselves cannot help, if they originate in our inherited weak nature. God knows us very much better than we know ourselves.

Sometimes failure quite disheartens us. We cannot concentrate our attention during our prayers, although we wish to. We cannot make any progress in life, although we have done everything in our power. It is good if at such times we can say: "Lord, Thou seest that we cannot do anything more." People do not understand this, because they cannot see into our soul; but God sees into it and He understands that we are not capable of doing anything more.

4) From the fact that God sees all things there follow not only warning and consolation, but an infinitely sad conclusion, too. What must the all-seeing God observe during a single hour in this wicked world? "Neither is there any creature invisible in His sight: but all things are naked and open to His eyes" (Heb. 4:13), we are told in the inspired word of God.

Thus we all stand openly, naked, and unmasked before God. What things does God see in us? What thoughts, what plans, what longings? Lord God, if the soul of each one stands unveiled before Thee, if the secret places of each heart are known to Thee, what a sea of evil and vileness Thou must look upon from day to day, from hour to hour! "I do not know the heart of the evil-doer"

said a great judge of human nature; "I know only the heart of an honest man; but even that is horrible."

On what does the eye of the all-seeing God fall, when He looks down from His heavenly throne upon all mankind at this moment? What a teeming, seething stream of people! Here some are being born, there others are dying. Here some are laughing, there others are weeping. Here some are praying, there others are cursing. Here some are doing good, there others are going to the devil. He sees that frivolous girl who, instead of attending mass, has gone to a so-called "petting-party." He sees drunken sailors brawling in a soul-destroying den in some port. He sees the idler, still lying in bed but already planning his sinful evening. How many things God must see at this moment!

And He sees something else—for us this is most important. He sees something else: He sees us. He sees each of you, brethren, sees your spiritual frame of mind, every secret plan, desire, and thought of yours. He sees how you neglect your soul, how long ago it is since you went to confession, to communion. Tell me, can you bear His glance calmly? What does God see in you? What does He see? Does He see a chaos, a reckless disorder? Does He see the anarchy of uncontrolled impulses, a few half-hearted attempts and ten times as many failures?

Brethren—if I may speak in a very human manner—tell me, are you not sorry for this all-seeing God? Do you not want to do everything you can so there will be less moral filth and mire in this world for Him to see? If you cannot influence others, there is your own soul; at least take care of that.

God sees not only the evil-doer; He sees also the upright. Just a moment ago I mentioned the multitude of sins which God must see at this moment. But He sees other things, too, at this moment. He sees the congregation praying in this church, and those at prayer in a

hundred thousand other churches of the world. He sees how the heart of that little girl leaps for joy as she receives holy communion, and how hundreds and hundreds of the dying lift their dimming eyes to the cross, how the nun in unceasing prayer kneels before the Eucharist. He sees how some missionary in India suffers in the fever of malaria. And He sees how heroically His faithful children fight against a thousand enticing temptations. Brethren, we will take pity on God, that if He looks upon us we may be a consolation to Him, a cause for rejoicing to the all-seeing God.

Dear brethren, I have spoken of the all-seeing God, and now, when I wish to conclude my sermon, an interesting observation occurs to me.

Have you noticed the increasing number of people who wear glasses? Our eyesight is becoming worse and worse. More and more people among us are farsighted, and that not merely in a physical sense, I am sorry to say. There are still many people with good eyes, but there are so few that have good spiritual sight when they look at their own souls. At such a time most persons are farsighted, seeing no fault in themselves, not noticing how insufferable and capricious they are, fearful of any sacrifice, sensual and arrogant; although they see the faults of others at a great distance, the same faults they fail to detect in themselves.

God, however, is neither nearsighted nor farsighted. He is all-seeing.

Let us beg God to improve our spiritual sight, that we may see ourselves with His eyes. Father, help me so to live, to speak, and to think, that Thy all-seeing eye may rest joyfully on the struggling, fighting soul of Thy ever faithful child. Amen.

XIV

THE ALL-WISE GOD

In the third century before Christ, a certain king of Sicily, Hiero by name, built a big ship, so big that, when it was finished and ready to be launched, there was no possible way, even with the aid of an immense number of men, horses, and machines, to move it from the dry land. The people in their extremity turned for help to Archimedes, the renowned mathematician. Archimedes promised to construct a machine by which one man would be able to raise the ship easily. Of course the people shook their heads in disbelief. The machine was made—it was a series of pulleys—and Archimedes requested the King to launch the ship. In sight of all the people, the King raised the ship without effort, and let it glide into the sea. Afterwards the King, in his joy, decreed that everyone should consider whatever Archimedes said or did from that time forth, to be good and wise.

With that little machine Archimedes merited such unusual honor. What, then, shall we say of the Lord God, the Designer of this wonderful world-machine? How shall we exalt His wisdom when through our microscopes and telescopes we observe the marvelous mechanism of the universe, and are dumbfounded? The Sicilian king's edict required everyone to consider Archimedes to be wise. The inspired written words of Holy Scripture and the laws of the amazing mechanism of the universe require that we consider God, the Creator and Ruler of the world, to be infinitely wise, the original source of all wisdom, Himself Wisdom.

God is absolute Wisdom. For whom do we call wise

among men? Surely the man that has a correct theoretical conception of the world and knows how to appraise his deeds and his way of thinking by eternal standards, and to fashion his life in a manner worthy of that conception. And when we speak of God as wise, we proclaim the accord between His theoretical and His practical knowledge, that is, what He thinks or does is always the best thought and the wisest deed.

Today I am going to speak of the all-wise God. We shall consider two questions: What proclaims God's wisdom, and what seemingly denies it?

WHAT PROCLAIMS GOD'S WISDOM?

"How' great arc Thy works, O Lord? Thou hast made all things in wisdom," sings the Psalmist (Ps. 103:24). In another place he says: "Of His wisdom there is no number" (Ps. 146:5).

And indeed every tongue may well repeat those words of praise. When looking at the world with observant eyes, we find evidence of God's wisdom on every side. At some moment of deep insight, the greatest scientists have experienced the mood that dominated the soul of the man who founded the science of electro-dynamics, Ampere. One day, during his researches, he suddenly buried his face in his hands and exclaimed: "How great is God! How great is God!"

1) Let us look at the very smallest of existing things. Invisible to the naked eye, millions of them teem in a glass of water, and the naturalist sees whole wonders of wisdom in the construction and vital activity of even the minutest. The name of an elderly Jesuit, Father Wasmann, living in Germany, is well known to scientists. He has devoted almost his whole life, we might say, to the

observation of ants. The results of his investigations fill us with amazement at the wisdom displayed in those tiny insects' way of life and in their social and martial habits. How wise God, the Creator of the world, must be!

2) Now let us turn to the earth and to the stars. The earthly seasons of the year show a most admirable adjustment. In spring the year is born like a child, in the summer it grows to adult maturity, the autumn brings the fruit of its work, and in old age, in winter, it sinks into the grave. What pleasing variations, how much wise and loving care! And all this would be at once destroyed if the earth's axis were in a position slightly different from its actual inclination or if the earth's relation to the sun were to change even slightly. How wise God, the Creator of the world, must be, who arranged that everything should be as it is!

Of course there are people of shallow mind who criticize the world and declare that they would have known how to arrange everything better: But it is a remarkable fact that the more profoundly anyone studies the cosmic system the more humbly does he bow before the wisdom of God: and again, the more superficial anyone's judgment is, the more readily does he criticize the world.

Profound thinkers agree with Kepler, the great astronomer, who died three hundred years ago. In the preface to his work, *Astronomia Nova*, he addresses his readers thus: "And now, dear reader, let us obey the summons of the Psalmist and, remembering God's great goodness to man, let us proclaim the glory of His wisdom and of His omnipotence. . . . I, too, want to show the marvelous wisdom of the Creator. . . . I will endeavor to show you that in the most hidden motions the almighty wisdom of God radiates toward us" (Frisch, *Kepleri opera omnia*, III, 146).

Yes, the wise man thinks thus. The superficial man, the

one who criticizes so freely, is like the tramp in a certain story. Being very tired, he lay down in the shade of a mighty tree, and began to philosophize in this manner: "How strange this world is! It is not arranged properly. Here is this gigantic oak tree, for instance. What immense branches it has, and still it bears nothing but little acorns. And here beside me is this melon tendril, as thin as a string, and yet it has to nourish such big fruit. This world is not arranged properly." However, when he reached this point in his reflections, a slight breeze arose and an acorn fell, hitting our fault-finder on the tip of his nose. He was startled. "Or perhaps," he continued, "it is arranged properly after all. What would have happened now if melons had been growing on this tree?"

3) That the order of the universe is wonderfully devised, we see especially if we search still further and think about our own selves, of the life of man, of that splendid evidence of the Creator's wisdom, man standing erect, man with eyes deep as the sea, man with the bearing of a king, man with a forehead radiating intelligence.

But as yet we have only looked at man's appearance. What should we see if we could look at his soul: at the powers, endowments, and beauties of the spiritual being that resembles God? What heights of intellectual attainment are revealed by the geniuses of the world! What power of will and loftiness of purpose are displayed in the lives of great heroes!

When we are astounded by the thousand evidences of God's wisdom scattered over this world, let us call to mind the conclusion reached by Aristotle, namely, that man's soul has but a dim presentiment of God's wisdom, as nocturnal creatures, like the bat, have of the splendor of the sun's light. We perceive so little of the wisdom of God. What, then, must the full reality be? What must the infinitely wise God be like?



II

WHAT SEEMINGLY DENIES GOD'S WISDOM?

But now at Aristotle's impressive statement we will pause; here I cease praising God's wisdom, that I may turn to its defense. It is true that Sacred Scripture and the harmony of the universe exalt the wisdom of God; yet from human misery and suffering the grievous lament of the *De profundis* is heard. Can the Creator be infinitely wise if He allows so much needless suffering and so many useless catastrophes to afflict the world, the work of His hands?

Do not be surprised, brethren, that I again speak of the problem of suffering. I cannot help it. I must speak frequently of what is strangling the soul of the man of today. Who of us has not felt, in his own experience, that we are almost enveloped by the flood of suffering?

1) The world resounds with complaints and arguments against the wisdom of God. Long ago Aristotle gave the answer to the majority of these complaints, when he said: Man's soul has but a dim presentiment of God's wisdom, as nocturnal creatures, like the bat, have of the splendor of the sun's light. The reason for our complaints is that we have only weak human eyes and cannot see the course of the world and its fluctuations with the eyes of God. Had we such eyes as God has, all our laments would cease, because we should see everything in the world differently.

For instance, take our own limited observation. So many problems confront us, so many sad disasters, so many dark clouds. But everything is clear to God. His benign hand guides everything, and His wisdom weaves the pattern.

Here all around us frivolous people are living, smiling and good-natured in their frivolity. But God sees the

secret bleeding of their hearts and the suppressed yearning of their souls for higher things. Here all around us people are living—honest people, yet weeping with torn hearts—and God sees how their every tear is transformed into eternal treasures in the fires of sacrifice offered for God's dear sake. Indeed God sees thus; but the human eye sees so differently.

The world is full of people snatching only at amusement and pleasure. Many envy them. Yet in God's eyes they are nothing but dry and fallen leaves. A mother struggles in unrecorded obscurity to provide for her five fatherless children. Many young women heroically suffer privation and keep to the path of honor; and they are sometimes mocked and derided for it; but God's eye, His all-seeing eye, rests on them lovingly. That eye, seeing the rottenness beneath the most fashionable evening clothes, turns away from it, but looks tenderly upon the high-minded even if they are dressed in patched and shabby apparel. Many heads now carried proudly would be humbled in shame, and many bowed shoulders would be straightened if our eyes were like God's. This would come about if with our eyes we could see and judge as God does, who measures every happening in the world by the infinite horizon of eternity.

2) Moreover, only if we think of God's wisdom in this way, only if we believe that what He does is always the best and wisest, only thus can we think rightly of the effectiveness of prayer, too. No wrong opinion of ours will forge arguments from this against the wisdom of God.

"How I prayed for this or that, how I entreated God to hear me; and He did not," is a complaint we often hear. "Why did God command that I should pray, if He doesn't hear me?"

Brethren, you are mistaken: He does hear you, though not always in the way you planned with your nearsighted

human vision, but as His wisdom, working with eternal perspectives, saw to be good. The wound in your soul is sore now, your heart aches now, but sooner or later the time will come when you yourself will acknowledge that the Lord God arranged everything in the wisest way for you.

Does God hear us? Of course He does. Anybody who thinks that, for prayer to be heard, every request of ours must be granted according to our tastes, such a one does not know the principal object of prayer, nor does he know God. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts . . . saith the Lord" (Is. 55:8). One of the objects of prayer is to turn our thoughts, which have strayed so far from God, in His direction, that we may draw nearer to His thoughts. A great disaster threatens, a member of the family is ill: we pray. It may be that, nevertheless, the blow falls; we prayed not simply that the blow should be averted, but that, should it fall, we might have sufficient strength and clearsightedness to be able to fit everything into God's plan and, with our eyes lifted to Golgotha, be able to bear it.

You know, do you not, the crushed and forsaken feeling in the hearts of those holy women who went to the sepulcher early that first Easter morning to anoint the Savior's body with sweet spices. It is noteworthy that their path, which ended in the happiness of the empty Easter grave, began in the dark night. The sleeping town lay in darkness when they started out, when they started on their way to the gloomy sepulcher, their eyes heavy with weeping. Everything broken, everything hopeless . . . but in them the last rushlight burned with a living flame: faith even beyond the grave. And that faith received its reward.

Does not the darkness of that Easter-eve tomb envelop us sometimes? Does not everything in us sometimes seem to have perished? Thick darkness falls upon us, and we

cannot see a step in front of us. The sunny faith of our youth seems to have finally disappeared. We have no heart to pray, to go to church, to resist temptation; we have no heart even to live. We feel as though God had forsaken us, as though God had died again.

Brethren, have you never lived through such terrible hours, days, months? Perseverance, perseverance! Perhaps you cannot even pray; but strive still to believe. You cannot believe; but strive to live as though you did believe, as if you were as certain of God, of the soul, and of the life eternal as you ever were. And if you are unable to do even that? Then, at least cry to the Lord: "My God, what will become of me like this? I should like to pray; but I cannot. I should like to believe; but I cannot. My God, help me."

Those holy women went through that darkness, and at the end, at the end they came at last to the empty, shining, consoling Easter sepulcher. "As though it had all been a bad dream," they may have thought to themselves. And you, too, will some day say that, if you but continue close to the love of the all-wise God.

However, time is needed for that. With the works of God it is the same as with the works of great painters: we cannot see them well or enjoy them if we are too near them; we must view them from a certain distance. God's decisions, when seen quite close, may appear bewildering, but, when contemplated in the perspective of eternity, they make us feel the throbbing of paternal love.

3) As soon as we seek God's wise intention in permitting human suffering, the overcast sky at once begins to grow brighter. It is true there is much suffering in this world. But not all suffering contradicts God's wisdom; only blind, meaningless suffering would do that. God allows suffering because He loves, and there is always some purpose in it.

a) "How can a good God allow me to suffer so much?"

we sometimes hear. To that we must answer: "He allows it precisely because He is good."

"Our Father." So we are His children. What a fragile, weak thing a child is! I could not hurt a child without some very good reason. As a grown man, I would be ashamed of so misusing my strength. Is it not blasphemy to think that God misuses His power and heartlessly allows His children to suffer without any reason and for no purpose?

But why, then? Can anyone cause suffering if he loves? Yes, certainly. When a little child darts after a butterfly and reels on the brink of a precipice, how convulsively its mother clutches it! The pressure hurts the child, although the mother used that force in love; even saved the child's life by it. When a parent takes a knife away from his child, the child may cry, sulk, and become obstinate; but the parent causes this grief from love. A mother holds her suffering child that the doctor may operate on it; and the little child, not understanding, kicks and rages against its mother, although the mother does this out of love, too, and in her heart she suffers more than her child does. God has no pleasure in the suffering of His children. If He allows them to suffer, we may be sure there is always some good purpose in it.

b) What purpose can God have in allowing suffering? Is it not an interesting phenomenon that, when the sharp instinct of animals warns them of some impending physical catastrophe, they crouch tamely near to man, as though to show that their one hope is in the lord of nature? And so it is with man. When disaster overwhelms him, he turns heavenward, to God, as though to show that only near Him can peace be found in the hour of need.

What is the object of suffering? If this earth were a paradise, we should forget the heavenly kingdom. If there were no dark night, we should not appreciate the glowing sunshine.

What is the object of disaster? Well, what is the use of the cool valley? There the humble violet grows.

What is the object of unhappiness? Why, even that for which the stony, rocky, mountainside is good: there in the scorching sun the most fiery wine ripens. When we have been humbled, we can pray more fervently. When people are unkind to us, we feel more intensely that God is good. When this earth is desolate, the thought of heaven is more consoling.

Brethren, let us acknowledge that God is wise, after all. And especially let us acknowledge that hours of suffering are hours of divine grace and mercy. If I could only repeat with all my heart: Hours of suffering are hours of divine grace and mercy, because they are hours of reparation.

"A just man shall fall seven times" (Prov. 24:16); and according to St. John, we lie "if we say that we have no sin" (I John 1:8). We have, then, things to repair. Yes, the better we love God, the more we notice the faults in our own soul, and the more we see how much we have to correct. So it happens that the ones who go most frequently to confession are—the greatest sinners? By no means. Rather they are those who are nearest to God, whose sensitive souls notice even the specks of dust. And the most impressive strength in suffering is shown by those who, according to our weak, human way of thinking, have deserved it least of all. But they endure, for they believe that, whatever God does and whatever He thinks, His way is the best and the wisest.

If anybody doubts the wisdom of God because there is trouble in this world, such a one would do well to read St. Augustine's remarks on the subject. He says: "If an inexperienced man chances to enter a workshop, he will see many tools there and will not know what purpose they are meant to serve: and, if he is very stupid, he condemns them as superfluous. Moreover, should he burn himself, or cut himself with some sharp tools, he con-

siders them dangerous, too. But the craftsman, who knows their use, smiles at the stupidity and, taking no notice of the foolish remarks, continues his work undisturbed. And see, men are just as stupid. In the workshop of a craftsman they do not dare find fault with what they do not understand, but think that what they see in the workshop is in order, and that everything has its use. Concerning the works of this world, although proclaiming its Creator and Governor to be God, they dare to criticize many things for which they see no reason; they behave as though they were experts regarding the tools and masterpieces of the Almighty, whereas their ignorance is pitiful to see" (*Gen. c. Manich.*, i, 16, 25).

No, no; we do not want to judge thus. We believe in the loving heart of one who is infinitely wise and who orders everything in the wisest way—our heavenly Father.

Dear brethren, there was once a child who had a pet lamb. The lamb played and skipped about, till at last a thorny bush scratched it a little, and the bleeding animal broke into dismal bleating. Then the boy ran to his father. "Come quickly, papa," he said, "and cut down that wicked bush at once. Why does it hurt my little lamb?" His father made the boy sit down quietly beside him, not far from the bush, and they began to watch in silence. In a short time a small bird came and perched on the offending bush and enraptured the listening child with its joyous singing. Then it gathered together the bits of the lamb's wool that were entangled on the thorns, and flew away with them to its nest.

"See, my boy," said the father; "the wool of your little lamb will keep the tender nestlings warm in their nest. Well, tell me, shall I cut down the thornbush now?"

No, the child did not want the bush to be cut down. Somehow, in his little heart, he dimly surmised that, even behind the manifestation of suffering and pain in this

world, the infinitely wise, solicitous face of Our k
Father shines forth. eavenly

Father, all-wise God, grant that I, Thy child, may never
forget the words Thou hast spoken: "Such as I love, I
rebuke and chastise" (Apoc. 3:19). Amen.

XV

THE JUST GOD

Every summer thousands of visitors are attracted to Salzburg by the Festival Plays. One of the most impressive of these plays is *Everyman*, by Hugo von Hoffmannsthal. When the weather permits, it is performed in the square before the ancient cathedral.

Who is "Everyman"? He is anybody, all men, every wealthy man who lives his heartless life in selfish dissipation, until—perhaps while at a lavishly furnished table he is seated with riotous comrades—all at once a long drawn-out call is heard, which sends cold shivers down each back: "Ev-er-y-man." Everyman looks up. Now from the opposite direction the call of death is repeated, now from this side, now from that: "Ev-er-y-man."

God has sent Death, and Everyman must go meet God. With a frightened face he pleads for a respite. Must lie go thus, with empty hands, to face God? "Give me just a few years' delay, even a few days," he implores Death. At last he receives an hour's grace. "Now seek some companions who will come with you to meet the Lord God," Death says to him.

And Everyman begins the search. But what disappointment befalls him! He begs his boon companions to accompany him before the Lord. "What? Oh, not that." And startled, they disperse in all directions. He begs his nearest relatives, begs the sinful woman with whom he has lived for years: all run away from him affrighted. "But at least my money-coffers will accompany me." No. Now even the devil of wealth resigns from his service.

The hour is passing; only a few minutes remain. Finally Everyman makes his holy confession. And behold, now a few sickly, feeble figures drag themselves toward him, the few good deeds that somehow or other he performed in his life. And these, these alone, offer to accompany him to meet his God, to meet the just God.

The play is ended. The audience disperse. But in every soul the sacred tranquilizing thought vibrates: indeed only the final divine justice can be the answer to the tormenting questions of the injustice of the earthly life.

The just God. Of Him I wish to speak today. The just God, who is no respecter of persons, who does not reward or punish according to appearances, because one person has a beautiful face and another is endowed with earthly possessions; but who judges according to the inner values, and gives a just verdict.

GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

i) When we call God just, we think first of all that He does not judge by appearances, but by inner spiritual worth: not according to beauty, property, or good fortune, not according to the results obtained, but according to the intention with which the work was done. In a word, God is no respecter of persons. St. Paul clearly proclaims this when he says: "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11).

God is no respecter of persons. How this truth soothes me! In His sight it is not decisive whether you were a beggar or abounding in wealth, weak or strong, ill or healthy; but this is decisive, whether you have made good use of what He gave you.

God does not bestow gifts equally on each one, but to everyone He gives as much as is necessary for the attainment of his eternal goal. He gives to each what is neces-

sary that each may fulfil God's plan. And in accordance with this He judges also and does not demand equally from all. From one, to whom He has given five talents, He will require another five; but to whom He has given only two, from him He will require only two. (Matt., chap. 25.)

2) In another sense, therefore, we can say that God is a respecter of persons. This thought comforts us still more. God does not direct our affairs according to a single pattern, but judges each person individually, separately, as each deserves. He, and only He, knows with what a burden of inherited propensities you came into the world, and what heroic exertions you made to free yourself from these inherited fetters. And God calls you to account only for your own faults, for those things for which you are responsible. He knows how little care was taken of you at home in childhood, how your bringing-up was neglected: and He counts all these conditions as mitigating circumstances. He knows to what great temptations you have been exposed at your daily work, how many vile conversations you had to hear, how many bad examples you had to see. All this He knows, and places it in the scales when He judges.

The best of earthly judges may be mistaken in his verdict. God cannot be mistaken. He judges everything justly. He is the only one who can judge our acts fairly. You cannot judge another fairly; even your confessor cannot see into your soul completely; you yourself are not always able to decide how much of a sinner you are. But the just God judges decisively and justly.

What consolation this is to us, that God knows our deeds better and judges them more justly than anyone among men, even better than we ourselves do! He sees how we struggle not to fall.

Even if we have fallen, the justice of God comforts us. How many fight against evil with superhuman heroism,

struggle, fall, rise again, stumble once more. I am not anxious about them. God commands us to forgive our fellow-men not only seven times daily, but even seventy times seven times if they have offended against us but are repentant. This same God will not be less forbearing with us. Only he who loves his sin, who holds it close to his soul, who vindicates it, only such a one is left by God in his impenitent obstinacy.

From the fact that God is no respecter of persons, it follows that He rewards justly and punishes justly.

II

GOD REWARDS JUSTLY

The just God rewards justly. The Lord Jesus found it wise to emphasize this often and in different ways. He best knew that the thought of a rewarding God would give us strength to obey the difficult divine commands. Therefore in one of His parables He tells us that when evening was come the heavenly Father called all His laborers and paid them their wages (Matt. 20:8). In another place He describes the conversation of His Father with a faithful servant: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21).

St. Paul also encourages the believers to persevere in Christian living in these words: "For God is not unjust, that He should forget your work, and the love which you have shown in His name" (Heb. 6:10). Moreover, at the end of a life spent in work the great Apostle consoles himself, saying: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just Judge will render to me in that day" (II Tim. 4-8).

But I should especially like to emphasize what a comforting doctrine of our faith it is that God keeps account of even the smallest good deed done in secret. That which no one knows of, that which you did many years ago and have even forgotten about, when you silently struggle against the multitude of your inherent evil propensities—God knows of all these things and for all this the just God will reward you. Hear once more our Lord's words: "I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil" (Apoc. 2:2). "I know where thou dwellest, where the seat of Satan is. And thou boldest fast My name, and hast not denied My faith" (Apoc. 2:13). "I know thy works and thy faith and thy charity and thy ministry and thy patience" (Apoc. 2:19). Consequently this is our great consolation: the just God. Or is there no need of a just God, one who will finally administer justice?

Two boxers arrange a championship bout, and the newspapers print columns about them; thousands and thousands of Sisters of Mercy spend their lives nursing the sick, but no one writes a single line about them. Is there no need of a just God?

A very wealthy man dies. He accumulated his houses, his building-lots, his automobile, all by swindling, craftiness, and cruel usury. But the world, not knowing these facts, buries him with pomp and splendor. The father of a family dies; he has labored hard day after day to keep his children from starving. Sometimes he would have needed only to look the other way; but he remained honest, and now his family is left in poverty. Is there no need of a just God?

No matter what temptations beset us, no matter how hard it is to take our stand for God's commandments, may the encouraging words of the just God ring continually in our ears: "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (Matt. 5:12). Yes, I believe in

the just God; I believe that every good act which I perform in this life, every act of self-control, every fulfilment of my duty, and every moral victory that I gain will shine as a brilliant jewel in the diadem of victory encircling my brow in life everlasting. This I believe, for I believe in the justly rewarding God.

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GOD PUNISHES JUSTLY

However, brethren, we cannot cover up the other feature of the just God's face. Therefore I must continue, and say: I believe in the justly punishing God, too.

i) I know this is a more uncomfortable subject. There are attributes of God that we think of only with reverence and adoration: for instance, God's holiness and His eternity. He possesses attributes that we can think of only with love: His goodness and His love. There are others which compel admiration: His power and His wisdom.

But God possesses one such attribute at the mere mention of which men's hearts become oppressed, at the mention of which anxiety rightly makes its home in the souls of many, and this is God's punitive justice. Many people fear this, draw back from the thought of it, and would like to deny it, argue it away.

It is marvelous what different measures people employ with regard to this question. They demand their rights to the last farthing, from others. They urge just treatment, when they are to be benefited. But where God is concerned, where there is question of His rights in opposition to theirs, they easily forget justice, and readily exempt themselves from God's commands. Yet, however disquieting it may be, we must not permit ourselves to suppress the truth that the just God punishes all evil justly.

The Lord Jesus, whenever it was fitting to do so, spoke of the rewarding God. But, when He considered this

thought not impelling enough to withstand the storms of temptation, or when He met with the obstinacy of sinners, He pointed to the punishing God just as emphatically: "I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). And again: "Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). And you are familiar with these severe words that fell from His lips: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (Matt. 23:13 ff.). And we can hear the tone of grief in His words about Judas: "It were better for him, if that man had not been born" (Matt 26:24).

If only the face of the just God would flash into our mind at every alluring temptation. When the dreadful moments of sinful enticement descend upon us, when it seems that every devil of hell had been let loose upon us, when evil suggestions flatter, promise, whisper, shriek, drive, persuade, and tempt us, if at such times the words of the Lord would come to our mind: "The Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels: and then will He render to every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). Only at such a crisis the thought of the hour of judgment would occur to us, the hour when we shall stand before the Judge awaiting His verdict.

"What shall I, frail man, be pleading?
Who for me be interceding
When the just are mercy needing?"

2) However, from the thought of a God who judges justly, we derive great comfort in the midst of the many injustices of this earthly life. Again and again we hear this lament: "Is God really just? Life is so full of terrible injustices. Is God just? Then how is it possible that evil-

doers live and prosper, while honest men starve? Is God just? Then how can He look on at the triumph of vice and see virtue trodden under foot?"

Thus the sufferers fret and struggle until they remember that, according to the teaching of our holy faith, God "will render to every man according to his works" (Rom. 2:6). If, then, we meet a wicked man who is prosperous in this world, our faith is not disturbed. We remember that God is just, and His verdict upon this man will be one of condemnation in the next world. But there is no sinner who has not done some little good in his life, and for this little good the just God rewards him—in this earthly life; for in the Beyond He cannot reward him. And if we meet a wretched, struggling honest man, our faith is not disturbed. We remember that there is not one man in the world who has not done something wicked at some time in his life, and the just God allows him to make expiation here, that in the Beyond he may receive only his reward.

As often as we see the prosperity of the evil-doer, we may recall the words of Pazmany: "The ox that you want to give to the butcher, do not put to work, but keep him in a spacious pasture on good food; the one you keep for your own service, harness often and let him draw the plow and cart, and use him for every kind of work. If you only knew why that rich man grows fat, for what that gentleman is putting on flesh, you would certainly pity, not envy him his condition."

As often as we see the prosperity of the wicked, we may recall the words of the Psalmist:

"Be not emulous of evil-doers; nor envy them that work iniquity.

For they shall shortly wither away as grass: and as the green herbs shall quickly fall.

Envy not the man who prospereth in his way: the man who doth unjust things.

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be, and thou shalt seek his place, and shalt not find it. And the enemies of the Lord, presently after they shall be honored and exalted, shall come to nothing and vanish like smoke" (Ps. 36).

3) Brethren, if it should occur to you to cavil at the justice of God because this earthly life is full of injustice, go out to the cemetery; among the quiet graves your rebellious soul will find peace. For divine justice can really be understood only in the awe-inspiring quietude of God's acre.

Otherwise, however we try to bring the multitudinous injustice of the world into harmony with God's justice, who would dare to say that he understands this perfectly? We cannot grasp this without some problems remaining, unless *we* call attention to the other life, unless we refer to divine judgment.

In this life many questions remain unanswered. Why does the sun shine upon the evil-doer and not merely upon the righteous? Why did hail destroy that God-fearing man's crops, and why did that heartless usurer have such an abundant harvest? Why did that young mother die, leaving five little orphans? Why does the earth not open and swallow that blasphemer? And all the other countless "whys" of ours—who can answer them?

No one can answer, except God's envoy, Death, who, at some time, lays his icy hand upon each man's shoulder and calls to each: "Ev-er-y-man. Whoever you are, come, come now before the judgment seat of the just God." And then the most nimble dancer will grow stiff, the most covetous hand will become rigid, the most wickedly alluring eye will grow glassy, the rouged lips will become deathly pale. It matters not a whit whether you possessed an automobile, a fortune, houses, fur coats. Nothing matters but one single question: Have you done God's will in your life? *And the evil-doers, "these shall go into ever-*

lasting punishment: but the just, into life everlasting" (Matt. 25:46). Then will be the perfect understanding of divine justice.

Dear brethren, at first the thought of divine justice seems to be a terrible and shattering doctrine of our faith, yet marvelously enough the Christian seems rather to feel confidence and love emanating from it. Steadfast faith in divine justice was always a trait of the Christian soul and of Christian peoples. Whenever Christians were persecuted, insulted, or unfairly treated, they consoled themselves with the thought: "The just God will reward." And as often as victorious foes treated a people with merciless harshness, from the lips of the sufferers the solace burst forth: "The eternal Judge will administer justice to us. We believe in an eternal divine justice."

Truly, if we mean well and strive with all our heart to be faithful to God, divine justice does not frighten us; it encourages us and urges us to love. And this is the true Christian way of thinking.

We know the fear of God, too; but that does not signify dread of God. There are people who dread God, as if He were some kind of policeman. It is true that the Lord punishes. And we also fear the punitive God, but still more do we love Him, a hundred times more do we love the God who rewards justly. We love that just God who does not leave without reward even the giver of a cup of water to the thirsty. Thus in this life we sow and scatter the invisible little seeds of good deeds in the sacred belief that when once the sun of life eternal rises, from even the smallest of them glorious flowers will spring to form the crown of victory in our life everlasting.

My brethren, God is just, God is strict; but God is not pitiless, not merciless. In His face not the icy mien of the tyrant is set, but the mien of the merciful Father, ready to forgive always. The Son of God Himself came to satisfy divine justice, for "God so loved the world, as to give His

only begotten Son: that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John 3:16).

Whenever the thought of a strict eternal Judge would startle me, I kneel with a heart full of humble hope before the Bethlehem Babe and pray my prayer: I believe in one God. I believe in an eternal home. I believe in a divine eternal justice. I believe in the eternal bliss that awaits me. Amen.

XVI

THE MERCIFUL GOD

On April 4, 397, in the mysterious quiet of the dawn of Easter Saturday, the soul of one of the greatest men in the history of the Church, the tireless apostle St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, returned to its Maker.

The few sentences in which he took leave of his loved ones, are very touching; the doctrine which his farewell words contain is a sacred solace for us. The great bishop's last sermon was this: "I have lived among you in such wise that I should have no reason to be ashamed had I still to remain among you for a time. Neither do I fear death, for we have a good Lord and Master."

In the time of our own illness, we could wish for no greater comfort than to be able to say: "Lord, if it is Thy will that I should continue to live, I wish to live the years to come walking the difficult but holy path of Thy commandments, the path of Christian faith, love, patience, and endeavor. If, however, Thou callest me now to Thyself, I do not fear to appear before Thee, for Thou art a good Master to me: not a tyrant, but my good Master, my merciful God."

Today we are going to consider how the mercy of God consoles us and in what way it constrains us.

HOW THE MERCY OF GOD CONSOLES US

No divine attribute is more often and more clearly taught in the pages of Scripture or more emphatically

proclaimed by the personages of sacred history than God's mercy. And He has no single quality which can so console us—struggling, contending, continually stumbling human beings—as His infinite mercy.

1) To be a human being is a tragic fate. To be a human being means loving good, and yet being attracted toward evil. To be a human being means to determine enthusiastically to do noble deeds, and to remain weak in the actual performance. To be a human being means to strive toward God, and to be held fast in the mire of earth.

What would become of us if God were not merciful? What would become of us if we did not know, as we are told in the book of Psalms, that "His tender mercies are over all His works"? (Ps. 144:9.) What would become of us if God Himself had not said: "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"? (Ezech. 33:11.) What would become of us if after our fall God did not remain our anchor, of whom St. Paul says that He is "the Father of mercies" (II Cor. 1:3), and that "He is rich in mercy"? (Eph. 2:4.)

For us—continually stumbling human beings that we are—this is our only consolation. Our consolation is the merciful God of whom our Savior said: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just" (Luke 15:7). Thus the merciful God rejoices when He finds His lost sheep, and when His prodigal son returns to Him.

We not only hear words about God's mercy, we read of His merciful deeds, too. God tries in many ways and employs many means to save the sinner from his own impenitence, and thus from eternal perdition. Before pouring the tumultuous waves of the flood upon the sinful earth, He sends Noe to preach: if only they would repent. Before destroying Sodom and Gomorrha, how indulgent He is to Abraham who petitions Him.' If only fifty

righteous men are found in the city, if only thirty, twenty, ten, He will spare it; if only they repent. As often as ancient Israel revolted against the true God, He sent prophets to preach to them: if only they would repent. And when all this was of no avail, when mankind continued to plunge deeper into sin, He sent His only-begotten Son; if only they would repent. This is our consolation: the infinitely merciful God.

2) Because we read all this and much more about the divine mercy in the Bible, therefore the consoling hope of the remission of sins lives in our repentant souls. For this reason, Christianity dares to proclaim the almost unbelievable doctrine that there is forgiveness for every sin. There is not a sin in the world, even the most terrible crime, which the merciful God is not ready to forgive the repentant sinner. There is no person, even if his life has been one long chain of wicked years, whom the mercy of God will not forgive if such a person is willing to reform. As our Lord Himself declared, only one kind of sinner cannot win forgiveness—the impenitent. But such a one does not even want to find forgiveness.

Brethren, our contrite human soul, contending with fearful memories, feels what life-giving encouragement flows from this tenet of our faith: There is forgiveness for every sin. Whose soul is not despondent when he thinks of his past? Everyone with mature understanding shudders at the innumerable stupidities, frivolities, mistakes, and offenses of his past life. Who would not plead in the words of the Psalmist: "O Lord . . . the sins of my youth and my ignorances, do not remember"? (Ps. 24.7.)

But when we are overwhelmed, resigned and despairing, the picture of the merciful Lord shines upon us, our Lord who cast no stone upon the repentant woman taken in adultery. The picture of the merciful Lord looking forgivingly upon Peter who had denied Him, not driving away

the penitently weeping Magdalen, entering the house of the publican who made reparation for his sin, receiving into His paradise the thief who turned from evil in the last few moments before his death.

Then God is as merciful as that. One of Caesar's flatterers said to him: "Sir, you never forget anything in your life, except offenses committed against yourself." Well, that was flattery of Caesar, but it is the sacred truth of God. He not only forgives sin but also forgets it. Not only forgets it, but in His loving kindness He buries even the memory of it. And if we think of this, the yearning of the Psalmist wells forth from our soul: "Praise the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever" (Ps- 135:1).

3) If then, dear brethren, we think thus correctly of God's mercy, we shall not be surprised at one of the doctrines of Christianity which at first may sound amazing. We often hear people complaining in this way: There is a frightful doctrine about the damnation of those who die in mortal sin: that everything depends upon the state of a soul at the last moment. Even if we have been upright during our whole life and have always kept God's commandments, and only once fell into mortal sin; if death comes to us at that moment, we are damned. Is that not a terrible doctrine, to be damned for one single mortal sin?

Thus many complain, and what reply shall we make to them? That this doctrine is not taught by Christianity? No, we cannot reply thus, because it does teach this doctrine, that if anyone dies with a mortal sin on his soul, he is lost.

But, we may be told, that is a merciless, unjust tenet. If we have been upright our whole life, and just once by chance we fall into mortal sin. . . .

Now wait, wait. Here I must interrupt, for here you are wrong, absolutely wrong. Mortal sin is not some

hidden ditch into which a man falls without having any idea of it. Mortal sin is not a flash of lightning from a cloudless sky. Let us not play with the idea of mortal sin. Before a man commits a great sin, a mortal sin, this has been preceded by a long chain of lesser breaches of faith. Indeed for anybody who has faithfully served God his whole life, mortal sin is almost a psychological impossibility.

It is true that whoever dies in mortal sin, is damned; but whether his sin is mortal or not, only the omniscient God is capable of judging.

4) If we take this into consideration, we become aware of the essence of divine mercy and are able to reconcile the justice and the mercy of God.

We all know the human representation of Justice, a statue with eyes blindfolded to signify that Justice looks neither to the right nor to the left, is unbiased, is not a respecter of persons. If, however, we reflect further upon these symbolical representations, we become aware of one great fault which, indeed, we human beings cannot even help. We represent Justice as blindfolded, when, strictly speaking, we ought to represent her as very wide-eyed, with clear-seeing, penetrating eyes capable of seeing through everything. For only that judge can render perfect justice who sees through all, sees the secret mainspring of every deed, sees into the depth of every person's soul, who knows in what environment he grew up, to what bad influences he was exposed, with what powerful inherited propensities he had to contend; who knows, after all these have been summed up, how far the sinner is himself responsible.

How much of all this can be weighed by even the sharpest earthly judge? Sometimes nothing at all. For this reason, what spiritual torment it costs a conscientious judge to deliver his final verdict in some important trial! At

best, our human administration of justice is so limited and finite.

But all this is different with God, with the all-knowing God. Of this we can be certain, that at the final verdict in mankind's law-suit, on the day of judgment, immense surprises await the world. How many whose names were loudly acclaimed by praise and renown in this world, will hear the sentence of condemnation from which there is no appeal; and again how many who were despised and misunderstood by the world, will shine and rejoice through all eternity?

Here is the consoling answer to the objection. Since God's verdicts are in accordance with His omniscience, therefore He is not only just, but also merciful. Man is often not merciful, not forbearing, because he does not know the mitigating circumstances. But God knows all these, and therefore in Him justice and mercy are in the greatest harmony: God is just without being too strict, and merciful without being too lenient. Hence God does not judge anyone more strictly than he deserves; indeed, He judges with a goodness, carefulness, and love, which not even the most merciful man is capable of.

5) Our holy religion has always known and proclaimed this truth. And, since this has always been believed and professed, we can understand the strange fact, that the Catholic Church has never declared of any man that he is damned. It is an interesting thing, that the Catholic Church officially proclaims of thousands and thousands of persons that they are quite surely in heaven,—we call this canonization—yet this same Church has never declared, with regard to a single person, that he is in hell, that he is lost. This same Catholic Church which proclaims that those who have died in mortal sin are damned, which forbids mass to be offered for them, this same Catholic Church offers the holy sacrifice for all the faith-

ful departed, even for the murderer who has been executed. The decision as to how far he was responsible for his terrible crime and how much his birth, education, surroundings, and inherited taint must be taken into account, she leaves to the merciful God. This we do not know, no one in this world knows; only the all-knowing God. List the greatest evil-doers of the world, name the tyrants who have waded in blood, the executioners of untold thousands of early Christian martyrs; and ask the Church: "But surely these are damned?" And what will the answer of the Church be? "We do not know, we do not know."

In Rome there lived an extremely zealous priest, who was called "Saint" by the people, and who also performed miracles among them. On one occasion, wishing to convert a malefactor who had been sentenced to death, he tried, but could make no impression on him. For three days, using all his powers of persuasion, he entreated the criminal not to die with impenitence in his heart. But the sinner continued to blaspheme, and mockingly refused to go to confession. When he was being led to execution, the priest followed, too; but in vain. The man still refused to listen to him. At last the priest lost patience and cried out: "Come, citizens, come and see how a damned soul dies." And do you know what the result of that exclamation was? Forty years later proceedings were started to canonize that priest. The miracles that he had performed were proved, and yet he was not canonized, because of these words he had uttered; for they were not worthy of a saint and of the holy Catholic faith. (Gratry, *La Philosophie du Credo*, p. 188.)

The Lord is merciful. Of Judas only do we know—as it is revealed in the Bible—that he was damned. But had even that unhappy Apostle repented of his sin at the last moment, had he thrown away the halter with which he was preparing to hang himself, had he knelt before St.

Peter and said: "Peter, hear my confession; I have sinned grievously; I have betrayed the Lord," do you know what Peter would have said to him? "Brother, I am a much greater sinner than you are. I denied him thrice. Repent of your sin. I absolve you in the name of the all-merciful Christ Jesus." Of Judas only do we know that he was damned. Damned because he himself wished it.

And in that sentence we find our greatest consolation, the soothing balm for our anxious human hearts. It is true, God is strict and just, but He is also merciful; therefore no one is damned, except those who themselves wish to be. It is supremely affecting to hear from the Lord's lips how lovingly He wished to save Jerusalem; but this did not succeed, because the inhabitants of the city did not want it. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," are the Savior's reproachful words—and they are likewise applicable to every lost soul—"how often would I have gathered together thy children . . . and thou wouldest not?" (Matt. 23:37.)

Merciful God, let me not have to hear on the day of judgment: Thou wouldest not, thou wouldest not.

π

IN WHAT WAY god's MERCY CONSTRAINS US

Dear brethren, I have already spent so much time considering how the mercy of God consoles us, that only a few minutes remain, in which to define in what way the mercy of God constrains us. Yet, although it is only natural that we prefer to think of the consolation of His mercy, still we must not forget the other consequence either.

True, God "is rich in mercy" (Ephes. 2:4), but this has a serious condition attached to it, which the Lord Jesus proclaimed plainly with great force in His parables

as well as in His open speech. And the condition is this: If we wish God to be merciful to us, we must also be merciful to our fellow-men.

When, in the closing words of one parable, the merciless servant is cast into prison, our Lord adds: "So also shall My heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts" (Matt. 18:35). I cannot imagine how anyone can read those decisive words and still say: "No. I have been deeply offended; I will not forgive." Do you not hear: "So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not"?

Our blessed Lord taught us to pray to God: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Yet there are people who carry the pale, poisonous flames of anger and hatred in their hearts for years, saying: "No. I will never forgive."

The Lord Jesus says: "For if you will forgive men their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offenses. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses" (Matt. 6:14, 15). Yet there are people who can say: "No. I will never forgive them."

Brethren, let us not deceive ourselves. If we want God to be merciful to us, we must be merciful to our fellow-men. There is no man in the world, however rich, who does not need mercy; and no man, however poor, who may not exercise mercy.

Let us look back upon our lives. How often ought we to have struck our breasts humbly and said: God, be merciful to me, a sinner. And it is not necessary that some terrible crime should be on our conscience, such as murder, robbery, perjury, or depravity. It is enough if we remember our ingratitude, vanity, capriciousness, lovelessness, duties unperformed: these are enough to make us bow our proud heads in humility.

When a man stands thus before God,—so naked, un-

masked, and ashamed—then will he dare to be arrogant, to judge others, to take offense, to bear malice, to be merciless? Will he dare to see the mote in another's eye, dare to sweep before another's door? Will he dare to be a croaking frog, filling the air with gossip and scandal, forgetful that he himself sits in a swamp? Will he dare to say, like the boastful Pharisee in the Temple: "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men"? Imagine someone who is really good, a really pure man, imagine a saint; well, would he speak like that? Saints are always humble, always praying for their brethren; they are always merciful, always forgiving.

"But I am not a saint," perhaps you say. No, you are not. Of course you are not. I am sorry to say we are not saints. But just because we are poor, sinful, weak men, so often in need of God's mercy ourselves, for this very reason let us be forbearing and forgiving toward our fellow-men, and let us remember the words of the Apostle St. James: "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy" (James 2:13).

Dear brethren, there are people who look upon the reconciliation of God's mercy and justice as a separate problem. They anxiously discuss the question: Which is greater in God, His mercy or His justice? If we want to answer that correctly, we can only reply: Neither is greater than the other; for every attribute of God is infinite.

If, however, we think in a very human way, then we may answer: The mercy of God is greater than His justice; at least it is manifested to us in greater measure. For, when God in His justice punishes us and brings us to right paths, He does this that His mercy may have compassion on us afterward. And there is a still more glowing sign of God's mercy: the Son of God Himself became man, that God might have mercy on us.

If, then, we have raised this question, let us attempt to

learn from it that God's mercy is greater (at least it appears to be in our eyes). Hence we long to resemble the merciful God in our behavior toward our neighbor, merciful rather than hard, forgiving rather than implacable, sympathizing and forbearing rather than easily offended. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7)—these words of our Lord ring in our ears. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. . . . Forgive, and you shall be forgiven" (Luke 6:36, 37). Only if we are merciful to our fellow-men, shall we see that feature of God's holy face, the most encouraging, consoling, and uplifting for mankind—His divine mercy.

Merciful God, one thing we beg. Do not allow the frost of mortal sin to reach our soul. But should it somehow touch it, grant that we may never be able to remain quiet for one moment in that state; grant that we may never be able to live in it without regret and repentance. Heavenly Father, I strive toward Thee, I hasten to Thee. Help me to reach Thy kindly merciful heart, where I may pray eternally: "Blessed be the God . . . the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (II Cor. 1:3). Amen.

XVII

THE PATIENT GOD

A French poet recently published a book of verse full of the most terrible blasphemy. The title of one of the poems is *The Prayer of an Atheist*. What is in this poem? The most fearful temptation of Providence. Do not be indignant if I relate the contents briefly: I have my reason for doing so.

I entered a church, writes the poet, and there, kneeling on the cold stones, I prayed thus to God: "I deny Thee, and my proud neck I will never, never submit to Thy yoke. But I wish to make one final experiment. See, here I kneel before Thee in Thy house. Look down upon me and make an end of my struggles. If Thou dost in reality exist, send a consuming flash of lightning to strike me dead, that I may be justly punished for my unbelief. I await Thy chastising heavenly fire; only send it upon me. If the lightning strikes me, and my soul prepares to leave this mortal body, with my last breath I will cry, that truly Thou dost exist and that it was audacity for me to deny Thee. . . . But behold, the lightning does not come. I can rise again in perfect health and leave Thy house. In a word, Thou dost not even exist."

Thus the unhappy poet blasphemes, and the shuddering soul of the reader exclaims bitterly: "Lord, wilt Thou endure such things without a sign? Hast Thou no lightning, no hand with which to smite, that this evil-doer may be annihilated?"

Thus the impatient man rebels. But what is God's view? What happened to that poet after he wrote his frightful

blasphemy, we do not know. What he went through in the succeeding years, we do not know. According to a brief notice appearing a few years later, that defiant blasphemer unexpectedly retired to the extremely strict monastery of the Trappists at Algiers, and since then he has been doing penance there for his sins and has been thanking God for the infinite patience shown him.

If God were not so wonderfully patient, that poet would have been visited by a bolt of lightning when he wrote his blasphemous verse. If God were not so patient, that man would have been the prey of the devil long ago. That man, and how many others, too, how many perhaps even among us, if God were not patient. But God is patient, almost boundlessly patient: this is our great consolation. True, it is also an earnest warning for us.

How patient God is, and what warning we should take from His patience: to these two questions we must now turn our attention.

HOW PATIENT GOD IS

Whether we read the sayings of the inspired Scriptures or whether we contemplate the acts that testify to God's long-suffering tolerance, we are equally astonished at His marvelous patience, and some of us may even be indignant at it.

i) The Bible repeatedly declares the greatness of God's patience. In one passage Moses says that the Lord God is "merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion, and true, who keepest mercy unto thousands" (Ex. 34:6, 7). In another place he expresses the same thought in these words: "The Lord is patient and full of mercy, taking away iniquity and wickedness" (Num. 14:18). The prophet Isaiah says: "Therefore the Lord waiteth that He may have mercy on you" (Is. 30:18). And the prophet

Jonas prays in this manner: "O Lord . . . I know that Thou art a gracious and merciful God, patient and of much compassion" (Jonas 4:2). But all this is crowned by the words of St. Peter: "The Lord . . . dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance" (II Peter 3:9).

We human beings are impatient because our time is short. The person with little time to spare hurries, scrambles, is excited and impatient. But God is patient, for He is eternal. What we call a hundred thousand years is, in God's sight, a mere moment.

What good fortune, what thousand fold good fortune it is for us, that God is so patient with us! What would become of us, if God were as impatient as we humans are?

A mother comes, her eyes red with weeping, and says: "Father, the conduct of my grown-up son is unbearable. The same trouble has been going on at home for many years. Debts, creditors; he promises everything; I pay, and then the next week he begins the same thing over again. It is unbearable, it is more than my nerves can stand."

Who would not sympathize with this mother in her grief? We know what a miserable state of affairs it is, to have to live with someone and bear their thousand-and-one imperfections, inconstancies, and faults. But let us remember, brethren, that thus the Lord God tolerates us, thus He bears with man. Thus He suffers our wavering fickleness which pendulum-like sways our souls now here, now there. One day we belong to God, the next to sin. One day we believe, the next our faith wavers. One day we soar, the next our wings droop despondently. One day we pray before God's high throne, the next we lie maimed in some dark abyss into which we have fallen.

And then, after such a fearful fall, a great bitterness overwhelms us. "No, this cannot continue any longer. I

will rise and go to my Father." We plan how it shall be, what we will do, how everything shall be different. In the ensuing week, again a fall, and we are just where we were before. And again, again with no results. The book of some people's lives contains nothing but new leaves continually turned—tragic fragments. Truly, the patience of God is almost past understanding.

2) If we think thus of ourselves, we shall not be surprised at the often amazing length of God's patience, and we will bless it.

For many are indignantly surprised. We would have struck that blaspheming poet dead at once. We would have let the earth open and swallow those thieves that broke into the church and threw down the Holy Eucharist and trod upon it. We often become as embittered as the Apostles were against the unfriendly Samaritans: "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54.) The Lord Jesus, however, rebuked them, and said: "You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save" (Luke 9:55, 56).

It is good that God is not so impatient and does not smite the sinner at the moment that he sins. God withholds the punishment for the sake of the evil-doer and for the sake of those closely related to him.

What would become of the world if God were not so very patient? Would Levi the tax-gatherer ever have become the Apostle St. Matthew? Would that sinful woman ever have become St. Magdalen? Would Saul the persecutor have become St. Paul the Apostle? Would Augustine the sinner have become Augustine the saint? But why continue? What would have become of us, too, where would our poor soul be now if God, instead of being so very patient with us, had punished our first great sin at once?

Do you know why God withholds His punishment? Not

only for the sake of the sinner, but that the punishment of the sinner may not fall upon the innocent also. Hardly anyone lives alone in the world: everyone is surrounded by his family, his relatives, and his other associates. Good people and wicked people live together in the same house, evil and pure in the same family. If God were to punish the wicked immediately, this blow would also smite the innocent. Therefore He waits until the harvest, until the judgment. He says: "Suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into My barn" (Matt. 13:30). How great, almost incredibly great, is the patience of God!

II

WHAT WARNING WE SHOULD TAKE FROM GOD'S

PATIENCE

Since the Lord God is so patient with our continual back-sliding and imperfections, we may draw two important consequences from this. Both are earnest warnings for us.

1) First, as God is patient, we must also be patient. We must be patient with ourselves, with our neighbor, and with life.

a) You may be surprised that I say we must be patient with ourselves. You may not think that some people are very impatient with themselves. Why are we on this earth? What is our life's task? In the thousand changes of earthly life, to mature for the life everlasting, to resemble God more and more. We become like Him if we use everything, all the opportunities that come to us in life—our surroundings, our marriage, our children, our acquaintances, our profession, our struggles and disasters—as so much material given us by God from which, with en-

during patience, we must carve the one masterpiece of our life. Whatever would draw us down, the sinful propensities in us, against these we struggle; not furiously, not bitterly, not tormenting our soul, but with persevering patience. Does sin lie in wait for us at every step? Do so many things annoy us? It is all the same. We will not be disconcerted, the waves shall not ruffle our peace of mind: we will be patient with ourselves.

Our faith is strong; yet of a sudden—we ourselves do not know how—come tormenting moments of doubt, comes the feeling of spiritual abandonment. Our morals are clean, yet all at once—whence, we ourselves do not know—terrible, frivolous images come into our mind. What happens now? Well, if we are patient with ourselves, in the middle of the doubts we quietly recite the Creed; from the frivolous pictures we turn our thoughts away to some other subject. But if we have no patience? Then we shudder, are alarmed, worry and torture ourselves, and our frame of mind becomes still worse.

Patience with ourselves especially in illness. I know it is easy to recommend this, and difficult to observe it; still we must learn this, too. In sickness patience easily forsakes us, though impatience never yet cured anyone. But patience has. This makes the soul quieter, more hopeful, better humored, and consequently the body is more responsive to healing. The quiet, peaceful, gently smiling soul becomes master of illness more quickly than the sick person who disagrees with God and man, and is querulous and fretful.

It is easy to observe how relieved, how much quieter the most seriously ill person becomes, when he has made his confession and received communion, when he has received all the sacraments of the sick.

b) And we must have patience with our neighbor. The modern man does not want to understand that. "Patience is cowardice," he says, "patience is weakness." But just

the contrary is true. The man who can be patient with his enemy, is stronger than his enemy. The wife who can be patient with her husband's many caprices, is stronger than he, and cannot be wholly unhappy. The parent who can be patient with the many stupidities and follies of his growing son will not easily be irritated by him. Today it is necessary to exhort the excitable, impatient man to patience. Employers need to have patience with their workmen. Passengers crowding into a street car should have patience. Sergeants need patience while drilling new recruits. So also schoolteachers, touchy married couples, parents with worn-out nerves, all those who are easily scandalized, thoughtless gossipers and critics. "Judge not before the time; until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (I Cor. 4:5).

c) And patience, not only with our neighbor, but also with the affairs of life. Patience in this restless kind of hurrying life. He who sows in the morning, cannot reap in the evening of that same day; he who sets out to climb a mountain, cannot reach its summit at once. Patience, then, with the difficulties of life.

After a long mountain climb a tourist came to the snowy peak and there stood still at that immense height; at sight of the wonderful panorama of God's sublime creating, his soul experienced a delight such as he had never felt before. The struggles of the difficult climb were forgotten. It did not occur to him that all the beauty spread at his feet—those forests, precipices, rocks, wayside-streams—had all been obstacles that he had had to overcome with tireless patience. He felt nothing of all this. Everything merged into a single beautiful picture.

Even so we will some day look back upon our earthly life from the heights of the life everlasting. With gladness we shall see that, amid the bitterness of life, its obstacles and its failures, the faith and patience we showed

to God have truly brought forth roses of the unfading crown of eternal life.

2) Concerning the patience of God, we have a still more weighty admonition to consider. God is patient; but, good people, take care. Do not abuse God's patience.

Oh, how many abuse it! So often God's patience with the most atrocious sinner is incomprehensible to us. Often His power, His justice, His holiness almost become dim because of it. But terrible is the fate of those who abuse God's patience and from it gain encouragement to continue sinning. Holy Writ draws attention to this. Therein we read: "And say not: The mercy of the Lord is great, He will have mercy on the multitude of my sins. . . . Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day" (Ecclus. 5:6, 8).

a) Sometimes we see already in this earthly life startling evidence of the punishment of the sinner who abuses God's mercy. God is certainly not only merciful and patient, but also just; and history records cases in which the just sentence of God was passed upon the criminal in this life. As a preface to the history of the world, we could write these words: "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small."

The murderer Herod in his overweening conceit could wade for years in the blood he had shed; but at last a fearful illness seized him, so horrible that the world has seen few examples of it.

On February 25, 1758, one of the most violent foes of Christianity, Voltaire, wrote to his friend d'Alembert: "Twenty years hence the good God will be doomed." Exactly twenty years later, on the very same date, February 25, 1778, his doctor informed the dying Voltaire that his condition was hopeless. And Voltaire asked that a priest be sent for. But his anti-Catholic attendants would not allow this. Voltaire begged despairingly for a confessor; but in vain. He gave a blood-curdling cry, and died. After

twenty years truly "doomed." But who was doomed? The good God?

Chaumette, one of the most fanatical leaders of the French revolution, blasphemed thus in a speech at the Festival of Reason: "God, prove that Thou art, and strike me with Thy lightning." No lightning came; but a few days later his head fell under the guillotine.

Napoleon for many decades attempted to grind asunder the Church of God; at last he himself was ground asunder by the mills of God on the island of St. Helena.

Nietzsche, who cried: "The ancient God is dead, we have killed Him," ended his life as a madman.

God is indeed patient, but He is also just; and at long last He metes out justice to everyone. God is patient, for He desires not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. (Ezech. 33:11.) He is patient—if He were not, what would have become of us?—but at last He pays. God does not make each day a pay-day, but He keeps accurate accounts, and some day He will pay everything, everything to everyone.

b) At the beginning of my sermon I propounded the question: Why does God give no sign, even when we might sometimes expect Him to smite the sinners? Thus far we have considered, as answers to this question, many different truths: that God has time to wait, that He is merciful and wishes to allow time for conversion, that He does not wish to make the innocent suffer with the guilty, that He so respects human nature that He does not wish to intervene by force in human free will. Yes, this is all an explanation, but not a full one. All this does not enable us fully to understand God's patience. We cannot understand it unless the Lord speaks; and the final word will be His after all. When? When we stand before Him after death, and He begins to speak,—no longer the patient, but the just God begins to speak—saying: Now hear the results of your life proclaimed.

Only wait, wait, you impatient ones. Wait. The last word belongs to God. Noe was building his ark during a long period of years, and preached conversion during that time; Jeremias proclaimed the destruction of the country a long time before it happened; in one of our Lord's parables the owner of the barren fig tree waits for years before cutting down the tree. And so, when at length the pay-day of God comes, and He speaks for the last time, no one will be able to say that the verdict of God was unjust in his case.

c) Here the fateful warning flashes into our minds: How inept and foolhardy are those who abuse God's patience and defer their repentance till the last minute! "God will forgive me in any case, that is His business," the unbelieving German poet Heine once mockingly said. People do not dare to repeat his blasphemy, but many live as if they believed it. Because God is patient, they abuse His patience, until suddenly, unexpectedly death comes. Then, intoxicated with sin, they totter and fall into the arms of the God who judges all.

Yes, God is patient; but terrible will be the fate of those who abuse His patience. And who abuse His patience? Those who craftily count on making amends for their whole misspent life at the hour of death. But who guarantees that their last hour will not come suddenly upon them? Who gives them assurance that they will have time to make amends, that someone will call a confessor for them? And will their repentance be true and deep?

"A man should sow his wild oats in his youth," they sometimes say. "I live my life while I am young. There will be time to become pious when I am an old man of eighty. Anyway, the chief caution is that I should make my confession before my death. The Church teaches that, however sinful anyone's life has been, if he is repentant before death he will be saved."

Can it be true that the Church teaches this? Yes, breth-

ren, it does. It teaches that God is so merciful, so marvelously merciful, that, if anyone turns to Him with penitent heart even at the last moment, He forgives such a one, as Christ forgave the good thief who, at the end of a wicked life, turned to the Savior on the cross.

Yes, our good God is as merciful as this. But they are foolish who because of this think themselves warranted to continue sinning. Yes, however sinful our life has been, we shall obtain salvation, if at the last moment we are able to repent. If we are able to repent, if we are able. But this is almost a psychological impossibility for one who has been leading a life of sin.

On a recent occasion I reassured those who anxiously say to themselves: "If I have been upright and good all my life, but commit a mortal sin by chance, at the last moment, then I shall be damned—that is a terrible doctrine." To them I said: "If you are faithful to God your whole life long, it is almost a psychological impossibility that you should, at the last moment, fall into mortal sin and be lost." Today I must continue that reflection. It is true that the merciful God forgives the repentant sinner who turns to Him at the last moment. But if anyone has imbibed sin all his life, has wallowed in sin, has felt at home with sin, that such a person at the last moment—during the racking pains of deadly illness—should be able to feel true penitence within his breast, well, that is almost a psychological impossibility also. Brethren, I have been a priest for many, many years, and was on several fronts during the World War, and I have stood beside a vast number of the dying; but my soul is always oppressed when I think of the eternal fate of those who wanted to repent only at the last minute.

Blessed shall we be if we never abuse the patience of God who lovingly waits for our conversion, if we never forget the warning of St. Paul: "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and patience and longsuffering? Knowest

thou not that the benignity of God Icadeth thee to penance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God" (Rom. 2:4» 5).

Dear brethren, on one occasion the Savior spoke a very clear parable referring to the patience of God and also to the end of His patience. "A certain man had a fig tree," said our Lord (Luke, chap. 13), "and he came seeking fruit on it, and found none. And he said to the dresser of the vineyard: Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down therefore. Why cumbereth it the ground?" But the gardener begged his master: "Lord, let it alone this year also . . . if happily it bear fruit; but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

After waiting in vain for three years, the owner of the fig tree allowed it still one more year. Our Lord and God perhaps waits patiently for decades for us to bring forth fruit, but no one can tell whether God's patience will endure for another year. Today it still endures. And whatever kind of past is behind us, it is not too late to repent. In this earthly life we often have to say: Now it is in vain, it is too late. But the merciful God received the penitent sigh of the crucified sinner; then it is never too late to be converted for the life eternal.

Brethren, the penitence of the good thief may be a consolation, but it must not make us foolhardy. Holy Writ speaks of one sinner who repented at the last moment, so that no one should despair; but it speaks of only one, so that no one should presume. What mad speculation with life everlasting it would be if we reckoned only on our last hours, if we did not spend each day as if it were to be our last!

It is not foolhardiness, but rather a holy Christian practice for us to pray every day for the grace of dying well.

Let us pray that the merciful God will not allow us to die in the state of mortal sin: that He will send a kindly priest to our bed of sickness in our last hours, bearing the loving heart of Christ in his heart, a priest who will lay upon our lips the sacred body of Christ, and will raise our dimming eyes to the cross, to the crucified Christ, for the last time.

To the crucified Christ, to whom my last earthly prayer will rise: Dear Lord, in my earthly life I endeavored to become what Thou in Thy infinite wisdom planned for me. Behold, now I come trustfully into Thy holy presence. Amen.

XVIII

THE UNCHANGING GOD

In the Old Testament we read a beautiful description of the scene when Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive from God the two stone tables on which the Ten Commandments were written.

At the foot of the mountain are the many thousand tents of the Hebrews, who are migrating; Moses is up on the invisible heights. When the Lord God appears in the midst of the cloud and gives the Commandments to Moses, the cloud begins to roll and lightning flashes, while from the mountain smoke pours forth. "And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like a burning fire upon the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel" (Ex. 24:17). Famous painters have perpetuated this sublime scene on their canvases, the sublime picture of God sending forth His thunder and lightning.

How is this, the man of today asks. Can God be angry? Can His eyes flash lightning? Can His hand smite down? This is too human a way of speaking. "God became angry," we say, then "He was appeased." "He is grieved at sin" and "rejoices over the penitent." At one time "God turns toward us," at another time "He turns from us." When speaking of God, we say many things like this. Does God change? It is absurd even to think such a thing of God, someone may say. And he would be saying what is quite true.

God is not a human being, now good-humored and now ill-humored. God is not a human being, at one time in a bad temper and then again so elated as to be unable to contain his high spirits. God is not a human being who

according to his capricious moods is now severe, now lenient. No, God is not capricious, He is not a slave of moods. He is always the same, always unchanging.

But, although God Himself is unchanging, we human beings rightly speak of God's feelings. We say that God rejoices in the goodness of men and is grieved at their wickedness; that He is angry with the sinner, and appeased by the sinner's repentance; that He hears the prayer of the righteous, and turns His face from the evil-doer. We speak rightly of all this: yet God is unchanging.

How is this possible? To the examination of this question I should like to devote today's sermon, pointing out that God is truly unchanging, then explaining by what right we speak of Him as "angry" and "reconciled." In a word, are there different feelings and sentiments in God?

GOD IS UNCHANGING

1) Of all God's attributes, His immutability is what we least understand. We do not fully comprehend what is meant by saying that God is eternal, but our minds at least require that He should be so, that He should have no beginning. Even if we do not altogether understand that God is almighty and that He is everywhere, still we know that God must truly be all this. But that God is unchanging—this is so contrary to our own nature, to our human nature, that we are unable even to imagine it.

What is man? Ceaseless change. He is born, matures, and dies. We are now not what we were a minute ago. We do not think today as we thought yesterday: we are ever changing and planning, capricious and fickle. Not only we twist and turn in this perpetual shifting, but everyone and everything around us keep changing, too. We go to our birthplace, where we spent our childhood, where in those early years we knew nearly everybody

and every house in each street; and now? The whole town is strange to us, and a throng of unknown people pass us by. We change, the world around us changes, everything changes; only God is unchanging. God does not change, for He is eternal and infinitely perfect. He has no need to think and plan anxiously for His future, for in Him there is no future and no past, only eternal present.

We say this, we believe this. Do we also understand it? Of course not. Whatever we say of the unchanging God, is little more than stammering, a symbol, a shadow. Then must we refrain from speaking of Him at all? Indeed not. Even if we can speak of Him only in symbols, that gives a splendid impulse to the wings of our spiritual thought.

God is unchanging. This we do not understand. Therefore we seek symbols in the created world. Here are the gigantic mountains which we habitually call the eternal hills; and here is the ocean, the everlasting sea. We stand high up on some snow-covered peak and feel the breath of eternity: cities are built and crumble to ruins, nations appear and pass away; but in solemn dignity the mountains remain. We stand on the shore of the seemingly boundless sea. Is the unchangeableness of God like this? Of course not. All these change, mountain and sea both change. Mountains crumble, primeval forests die out and decay; and over many a lowland plain an ocean once tossed and rolled. Nothing in the world is permanent; everything begins and ends, blooms and fades, is born and dies, develops and grows old: the only fixture in the whole universe is the God who cannot change.

2) But how do we know that God is unchanging? By this, that above the continually rushing, cascading, thundering river of life in this world, the word of the Lord God is heard: "For I am the Lord, and I change not" (Mai. 3:6). The words of St. Paul the Apostle resound as he

quotes the Psalm: "Thou in the beginning, O Lord, didst found the earth; and the works of Thy hands are the heavens. They shall perish, but Thou shalt continue. And they shall all grow old as a garment. And as a vesture Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art the selfsame, and Thy years shall not fail" (Heb. 1:10-12). And we have the words of the Apostle St. James, who speaks thus of God: "with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration" (James 1:17).

Nor can there be, because God always possessed the perfection of being and consequently cannot become wiser, better, holier, or more powerful, since wisdom, holiness, and all other attributes were in Him in full perfection from the beginning. The Scripture, speaking of God's works and of His will, says that they continue forever (Ps. 118:90). And our blessed Lord said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Luke 21:33).

When the traveler is being conducted through the vaults and underground corridors of the Pantheon in Paris, the guide stops at one place and, indicating a certain spot, says: "On that spot rests the stupendous weight of this whole gigantic building." The one single stable spot in the perpetually shifting and changing universe is the unchanging God.

What encouragement we derive from this thought: the immutability of God! How safely we can place our trust in that God who is changeless, in God who is not capricious and who does not act upon the impressions or moods of the moment! What great power this represents for our weak-willed natures, that, between our inconstancy and the instability of this life, there is an island rising high above the boisterous waves of party strife, passions, and controversy! And this island is the divine immutability.

π

HAS GOD FEELINGS?

The thought of God's unchangeableness gives rise to difficulties in many breasts. I will devote the remainder of today's sermon to the consideration of these difficulties. If God is forever the same, if He is always changeless, then why do we expect that He will hear our prayers, that He will alter His original plan; and by what right do we speak of God's feelings, of God being angry with sinners, of God grieving over evil, of God rejoicing over the repentant? These are questions which we must face.

i) The first difficulty is this: If God is truly unchanging, why do we petition Him and pray to Him? If God's will and thoughts do not alter, if His plans and ways are always consistent, is there any sense in the many prayers, propitiatory sacrifices, acts of self-denial, and the like, with which man turns to God and by which he strives to alter God's original determination and intent? Briefly, if God is unchanging, is there any sense in the prayer of supplication?

Day by day, millions and millions of supplications rise to God. Does God, then, alter His plans, His purposes, and the course of the world from day to day? Such a thing is not to be thought of, dear brethren. All this appears to be a difficult problem to us simply because of our limited human powers of reasoning. If, however, we call to mind that God, besides being unchanging, is also all-knowing, the problem is solved immediately. We must not think childishly of this; then the difficulty is dispersed at once.

We must not think that we can influence God, now in this direction, now in that, by our prayers, and thus change His purposes. God is omniscient, knowing our needs before we tell Him of them in our prayers. God, in

His infinite knowledge, has seen beforehand what I, His puny little child, shall ask of Him at some time, some place, whether in this church or at home in quiet evening prayer. And He has already woven the effects of those prayers into the plan of my life. If He always knew what I now ask of Him, and if He planned my life beforehand in accordance with this, then certainly He does not change, even if we are able to say in our human way of thinking: "Now God has heard my prayer." To me, it seems as though He has "now" heard it, that is, as though God's thoughts and plans have been altered by me; whereas the truth is that God knows beforehand what I will ask from Him in my life, and in the plan of my life He took all that into consideration in advance.

God does not decide and act as we human beings are accustomed to do. He sees everything, every occurrence in the world, at a single glance, and with a single decision He brings each one into right proportion with the others, and establishes all means and every goal, every single entity and every happening in perfect harmony. Not one movement can take place in world history, not one prayer can leave man's lips which God does not know of in advance and which He did not measure to the course of the world in the moment of creation. God has taken everything into account beforehand, every human need, every request, and so He has no need to alter and improve the course of the world.

Hence we may calmly continue our prayers and petitions to God. It is much more Christian, consoling, and human to turn to God in all our affairs, rather than rage hopelessly in disaster or cynically await desolation.

A sailing-vessel, making its way from Brazil to Spain, was overtaken by such a violent storm that there was fear it might be wrecked at any moment. A few monks traveling in that ship, began to pray during the tempest. But there were also some unbelievers on board, who found

time even then to mock the priests at prayer. The ship carried a cargo of song-birds also and these whistled, chirped, and sang ever more lustily in the terrible storm. Thus you see one and the same event, with three different results. The birds sang in the midst of the danger because they had no sense; the unbelievers mocked because they had no faith; the Christians prayed because they had both sense and faith. They believed, surely, that God is unchanging; but they also knew that the value of their prayers had been woven beforehand by Him into the design of their lives.

2) This thought at once leads us to the solution of another difficulty, which may be stated thus: If God never changes, how can we say that now God is angry with us because we have committed a great sin; and, if we go to confession, that He absolves us from our sins and now loves us? Yesterday perhaps He was angry with us, today He loves us; so, after all, God does change, His feelings do fluctuate within Him.

However, if anyone reasons like this, he reasons only in a very limited human way. For again the truth is only this: Even if we say that God is now angry with us and that now He loves us, God has not changed. Not changed? No. Then who has changed? It is we who have changed, we who yesterday loved our sin, and today have repented of it; although the same changeless God looks down upon us today as He looked yesterday, yet His glance has a different effect today according to the difference in us.

St. Augustine wrote: "The same light that hurts weak eyes, is agreeable to strong ones" (*Sermons*, 22, 6). Then not the light has changed, but the eye. If sunlight falls upon hard wax it softens it; if it shines upon soft clay, it hardens it: two different effects from the same sunlight. But has the sunlight changed? If we pour oil upon a fire, the fire increases; if we pour it upon the waves of the sea, they subside. Has the oil changed?

Well, this is how we must think of God, too. He remains the same whether we are wicked, when His glance becomes wrathful, or whether we repent of our sin and His glance becomes merciful. Even as the sunlight that destroys mildew and bacteria when it shines upon them, shining upon a rosebud causes this to open its petals and become a full-blown deliciously perfumed rose. So, too, the same changeless God looks upon us when our soul is tainted as when it is pure and clean as a flower; but in the first case we say that He is angry with us, that is, He cannot cause life to spring forth in us; in the second case He loves us and rejoices in us, that is, He is able to exercise an effect upon us.

Then, whether we are good or whether we are wicked, not the unchanging God changes in Himself, but only His effect upon us is different. We say of the sun that now it shines, and at another time, that now it does not shine; yet in reality the sun is always shining, only sometimes the intervening clouds do not allow its rays to reach us. God's love is always shining, too, shining upon each one equally; but if a sin-cloud settles upon the soul, then God's love cannot reach it. At such times the soul becomes cold, gloomy, dark, restless, and we say: "God is angry." Yet the changeless God does not alter from moment to moment. He is the Sun of heavenly goodness shining in permanent love. God does not change, but the relations of man to God do change. God does not turn from the sinner; it is the sinner who turns from God. We supplicate and pray and make sacrifices, not because God has need of all this, but because we have need of this struggle, of this endeavor to progress upward, to mature spiritually. All this helps us to turn back to the eternally, uniformly shining Sun of divine love.

3) After such considerations we may attempt to solve the weightiest difficulty, the thought of God being angry.

There are people whose whole way of thinking strongly

repudiates the thought of a wrathful God, a vengeful God, a punishing God. They tell us this is much too human a way of speaking; we must not think or say such things of God.

Well, dear brethren, there is some truth in this protest. Truly it may be blasphemy, it may be degrading God to the status of man if anyone speaks of the wrathful or jealous or vengeful God; but it may also be an expressive form of a deeper insight into the nature of God. Everything depends on how we understand these expressions. They may be sublime expressions of that steadfast divine command, that we must never, under any pretext whatever, turn from the goal God has set us: and this goal is the formation of our souls in God's likeness.

If we consider these truths in this manner, we will not take exception to the expression "wrathful God," for then the "vengeful God" and the "loving God" will be one and the same in our eyes. Then we can safely speak of the "wrathful God" who is angry with us only because He loves us very dearly. Then we can speak of the "vengeful God" who strikes us with His lightning only to make us turn from our sins to our better selves, and so turn to Him. The terrible catastrophes, too, which we call "the punishments of God," will be evidence of God's love wishing to raise us to better lives.

The "Jehovah" of the Old Testament is identical with the "heavenly Father" of the New Testament. If the idea of God in the Old Testament is less sublime than in the New, that is because in the former the idea of the avenging God dims the thought of the loving God, and because the fact is not sufficiently emphasized that with God the time of punishment and of love cannot be separated: with God the act that is punishment is at the same time love; that is, the wrathful God is the same as the loving God.

From this belief of ours a splendid lesson can be learned for our spiritual life, namely, the permanent joy, the

never-failing serenity of the Christian soul. The life of one who thinks thus correctly of God cannot be spent in continual fear, in continual petty anxiety. St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, writes in one place: "I always see you smiling and I am glad of it. Anyone who has consecrated himself to God has no reason to be sorrowful, but rather to be gay." These are encouraging words. Did St. Ignatius not know the terrible solemn truths of the Christian faith? Did he not believe in the strict, eternal Judge who calls everyone to account? Did he not know of the wrathful and punishing God? He did indeed. Yet in spite of this he declared that anyone who has seriously given himself to God should not fear or be filled with anxiety.

Thus we understand the continual gladness, the radiant smiles of the great saints. Thus we understand St. Elizabeth, who said of gloomy pious people, that they looked as if they wanted to frighten God.

Then let me say a few warm, comforting words to those timid brethren who strive whole-heartedly to live according to God's will, who fulfil their duties faithfully, who are good, and behave lovingly toward their neighbor, and yet are troubled with scruples and anxieties, fearful that they are living in sin, that God has forsaken them, that they will go to perdition.

You brethren who are continually anxious, fearing and dreading God, I beg you not to be misleading testimonials of the spiritual life. Those *of you who* think of God with constant dread, with offensive pettiness, should read the sublime words of our Lord in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. Read, and be more courageous. "Now this is the will of the Father who sent me: that of all that He hath given Me, I should lose nothing; but should raise it up again in the last day. And this is the will of My Father that sent me: that everyone who seeth the Son and believeth in Him, may have life everlasting" (John

6:39-40). Does not the life-giving strength of the mercifully divine love emanating from these words, reach your souls like the ozone-filled air streaming from the pine-forests? Such a Father is not to be dreaded by one who wishes to be His.

True, God is a strict Judge also, a punishing Judge who calls each to settle his account. But while we are alive He is not only a Judge, but also our merciful Father, to whom we can always cry, as did the publican: "Master, be merciful to me, a sinner," a Father to whom we can always turn with the words of the repentant thief on the cross: "Remember me, Master."

Brethren, why do you fear the wrathful and punishing God? No one is ever damned, except those who wish to be. Keep God's commands and fulfil your duty in that state of life to which you have been called, and then you will have nothing to fear. It is an indifferent matter where you live your life; but it is not indifferent how you live it. If you received five talents from God, He will require ten in return; if you received two, He will ask four from you; if one, you must appear before Him with two.

They need not fear who have to struggle, nor they whose life is a continual battle against sin, nor they—who do not misunderstand me—who fall in the difficult battle. The only ones who need to fear are they who remain lying down, who feel contented in their fall, who wipe their mouth after sinning, and say: "What harm hath befallen me?" (Ecclus. 5:4.) These are the ones who need to fear the wrathful and avenging God.

Dear brethren, one of the finest thinkers of all time, St. Augustine, who followed paths of error and remained unbaptized until his thirty-third year, writes most touchingly about how he came from the darkness of error to the light of faith. He says: "I inquired of the earth: Art thou my God? And it replied: I am not. I inquired of the sea and of the depths therein. The answer was: We are



not thy God; seek higher, seek above us. I inquired of the whispering wind, of the air and of all its inhabitants, and they said: We are not thy God. Seek above us. And I inquired of the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars: Are ye my God? And they replied: Seek higher, seek above us. And I spoke to everything I was aware of, saying: If ye are not my God, speak to me of God. And they cried with loud voices: He created us. Go higher, seek above us." And behold, then Augustine's thoughts rose to the heights, above every created thing, to God's throne, and deepened into holy prayer in the sublime presence of the unchanging eternal God.

How good it is for us if we can lean upon this powerful God! We are all deeply affected by the unceasing disappearance of all earthly things. People are born and die. They come into the world and go to the grave. Nations develop and disappear. "And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth the will of God, abideth forever": thus Holy Writ comforts us. (I John 2:17.) God is the eternal beginning and the end, and this earthly life is only an episode, only a brief intermezzo, and its continuation will be in the realm of the everlastingly changeless God.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Sion; he shall not be moved forever that dwelleth in Jerusalem," writes the Psalmist. In the changes of this earthly life I cling to God with unchanging faith, that I may be able to stand before Him as an eternal hill in the life everlasting. Amen.

XIX

THE ETERNAL GOD

Towering above the other giants of the Swiss Alps, two immense peaks lift their snow-covered heads—the Jungfrau and the Finsteraarhorn: each of them is over twelve thousand feet high. These two mountain peaks carry on an interesting dialogue in a book written by Turgenyev, the Russian author.

High above, the pale green silent heavens; below, biting frost and gleaming snow. From beneath the snow, project masses of ice-covered rocks. The Jungfrau addresses her neighbor.

“You are taller than I am, you see more. Tell me, what is the news from down below?”

“Dark clouds cover the earth,” answers the Finsteraarhorn.

A few thousand years later—which, however, is only a moment in the life of the universe—the Jungfrau again asks her neighbor:

“Well, what changes do you find now?”

“Everything is the same down below,” is the reply. “The dark forests and the grey rocks are the same, but vast numbers of little two-legged insects are going to and fro among them.”

“Well, what news is there now?” asks the Jungfrau a few thousand years later.

“Everything is the same; only the insects are increasing in number.”

“Is there any change?” is the question after another thousand years.

"I seem to see fewer little insects," growls the Finsteraarhorn. "Everything is lighter. The waters have decreased, the forests are sparser."

Then a few thousand years pass, and the Jungfrau again speaks.

"And now?"

"Now whiteness reigns everywhere. White snow and ice everywhere. Everything has cooled. We can sleep undisturbed."

And the giant mountains sleep. The brilliant skies grow dim forever. All things above the earth have cooled forever.

Thus the two gigantic mountains converse in the Russian author's work; and cold shudders pass over the reader. Is this a dream, or reality? A figment of the imagination, or a truth that will sometime come to pass? We, the two-legged little insects, swarm, move, build, destroy, quarrel, kill, make war: for how long? For a thousand years, for ten thousand years? But every clock stops some time, every millennium expires some time, everything passes some time; but God lives eternally.

The eternal God. What do we proclaim about the perpetuity of God, and what does God's perpetuity proclaim to us? This twofold question forms the topic of our reflections today.

WHAT DO WE PROCLAIM ABOUT THE PERPETUITY OF GOD?

1) If I wished to give a short, negative answer, I should have to say: God is eternal, that is, He knows no time; the divine existence has no beginning, no end, and no continuation. Or, as we learned in the catechism, God had no beginning, neither will He have an end; He always was, is, and will be.

If, however, I wished to give a positive answer, I would

say briefly: God is eternal, that is, He is the Creator of time, and whatever is of positive essence in time, that is in Him eminently. Or, in other words, God possesses at once, absolutely and perfectly, never-ending life.

"Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed, from eternity and to eternity Thou art God," says the Psalmist (Ps. 89:2). In another place, he expresses the same idea thus: "In the beginning, O Lord, Thou foundedst the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish but Thou remainest: and all of them shall grow old like a garment: and as a vesture Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art always the selfsame, and Thy years shall not fail" (Ps. 101:26-28). God "who is and who was and who is to come" (Apoc. 1:8). God "liveth forever and ever" (Apoc. 5:14). Thus God is above time. In Him there is no time, neither past nor future, He is always the present.

I feel, however, that these definitions are only the skeleton, the framework of the wished-for answer, and that, to make the features of the eternal God clearer to us, I must give my answer in detail.

2) Let us, then, try to particularize what we proclaim by saying that God is eternal. We shall first require a few philosophical considerations. It is a special trait of man, that he likes to delve among the happenings of the past and to inquire searchingly into future events. Then he tries to form a concise picture of these times for himself. This attempt of ours is one of the manifestations of our resemblance to God.

But what do we know of the past and what can we foresee of the future? Hardly anything. God alone possesses an all-encompassing picture of the whole world, for He not only sees what is side by side in space, but also what comes in succession. When we say that God is eternal, we mean also that God is Lord and Creator of time and of

every occurrence, of every happening in the world. Even as God, being the Creator of all things in space, is everywhere, so, being the Creator of time, He exists always.

Now let us try to conceive what that eternal God can be like, that God who has no beginning and no end, and for whom there is no time.

a) The eternal God has no beginning and no end, but always possesses the fulness of existence in perfection. The eternal God then, has no beginning. Whatever we speak of in this world, we are able to consider it from its beginning to its end, from its birth to its death. Of man we say, from the cradle to the grave. Of a high tower we say, from its base to its summit. Of the whole world we also say, from the day of creation until the day of judgment. We make only one exception, namely, when we speak of God. Of Him the Scriptures speak thus: "From eternity and to eternity Thou art God" (Ps. 89:2). Of Him the priest celebrating mass sings: "*per omnia saecula saeculorum*, forever and ever." And Him the Christian believer extols thus: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be."

This is the eternal God, who has always been and before whom there was never anyone else, who never had a beginning because He never came into being, but always was; was, and is, and will be; who was never child and youth, adult and old, but always one and the same perfect Being; who never had a beginning, for He is the beginning of all things, even as in Isaiah He says of Himself: "From the beginning I am the same" (Is. 43:13).

He is the eternal, God who has no end. God is not only the beginning, but also the end, as He says in Isaiah: "I am the First, and I am the Last" (Is. 44:6). If, then, God is the beginning and the end of all things, then everything, originating in God—that is, the whole world—will some day return again to Him. When? When the created world

has reached its final goal for which it was created: the glorification of the Creator "that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28).

He is the eternal God, who always possesses the fulness of existence in perfection. "I am who am" (Ex. 3:14), He says of Himself. No one can give to God, no one can take from Him. No one can enlarge Him, no one can lessen Him; God cannot develop or decrease. He needs nothing and lacks nothing. The devastating waves of the flood thunder, flashes of lightning make Mount Sinai tremble, the trumpet of the last judgment sounds; yet God always remains the same, and a thousand years in His sight are as a moment. Behold, He is the eternal God, who has no beginning and no end.

b) The perpetuity of God signifies something else. Behold, the eternal God, in whose sight there is no time. What do we mean when we say: For God there is no time? Now I need to know what time is.

What is time? It is not easily defined. Is it something tangible like material objects? It is not, is it? Or is it a sea, in which the objects of the world float? Is it a flowing torrent, which sweeps everything toward eternity? Oh, no. All this is not a precise definition. We come nearer the truth if we say that time is not an object, is not even something, but only the relation of events one to the other: when we consider whether something has already happened, or only will happen. Perhaps we understand it still better if we say: Time is the irresistible succession of affairs, as these flow from the present into the past.

An old saying has it, that "time is the ruler of affairs." Yes, a merciless ruler: without ceasing, without rest, it drives everything forward, onward; there is no repose, no cessation, no immutability; everything moves, changes, passes. And above this ceaseless instability, above this teeming, moving inconstancy, above this rushing, hurry-

ing transiency stands the eternal God, "with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration" (James 1:17). "For I am the Lord, and I change not," God says in the prophet's book (Mai. 3:6). As St. Augustine says: "He is not subject to time, by whom time came into being."

But we can also understand time in another way. We can understand it thus: that time is a certain duration, length of life, of things. If I thus explain it, then the time of everything in the world is limited, its life is short. The life of man is indeed brief. The light of some stars takes millions upon millions of years to reach the earth from stupendous distances; yet the time of their course is limited. For thousands of years snow-covered mountain-peaks stretched toward heaven even before any living being existed on the earth; yet some day those granite mountains will wear away, the seas will dry up, everything will pass away. But there, in the whirlpool of universal change, stands the eternal God.

We can explain time in still another way. We can say that time is the atmosphere which surrounds us, the spirit of the age that we inhale and in consequence of which we say that we are the children of our times.

Truly we are the children not only of our parents, but also of our times, bound to our period by thousands and thousands of threads. "As the times, so the people," a German proverb says. Certainly we, who live in some one period of humanity's development, can hardly realize how the atmosphere of that time pervades our opinions, our actions, and our behavior, how this world changes around us almost according to the decade. It is so difficult, almost impossible, for the old to understand the young. In vain "time has passed them by," the young say of the old, and look upon them as relics of things that have been. But above the spirit of every time and every change, above everything bound by time, stand-

the eternal God, who understands everyone, young and old, who does not change with time, whom time can never pass by.

Then can we say that God is old or that He is young? We can say both, but both only in a human way, with reference to ourselves. Holy Writ, too, speaks of Him as old, for He existed millions of years ago; but young, too, younger than the infant born today, for a few hours of its life have already been lost, whereas nothing of God's is ever lost.

If we wish to indicate a man's age, what do we do? We say, "a thirty-year-old man": this means that thirty years of that man's life belong to the past. But of God we do not speak in this way. We say: He is eternal; that is, every moment the full perfection of life is in His hands. All this we proclaim when we avow that God is eternal.

Can we now say that we know fully what immense depths are encompassed by the everlastingness of God? Of course not. All we have said till now, all the beauty, all the sublimity that we find in this world, is but a tiny beam of the eternal God's majesty, shining through a crack in a window.

How good it is for us—driven by earthly worries, nervous, rushing, as we are—to rest in this eternal God's quietude! How good it is for us—bustling and hustling little creatures that we are—to calm our vibrating, restless nerves in the sacred peace of this eternal God! Brethren, consumed and almost destroyed by the feverish speed of this restless life, let us flee there for rest, to the calm heart of the eternal God.

And now I reach the second question of my sermon: What does the everlastingness of God proclaim to us; how much strength and how much comfort may we derive from it?

THE ETERNAL GOD

II

WHAT DOES THE PERPETUITY OF GOD PROCLAIM TO US?

One who can think often and lovingly of the eternal God will derive from this thought strength to resist temptation, and amid the vicissitudes of this transitory world, will find soothing consolation.

i) The thought of an eternal God is strength in temptation. The boundless sea of happiness which is comprised in God, will sometime become our portion if we have spent our earthly life in faithful service. Then is it not worth while remaining true in times of temptation for this? Would it be worth while exchanging this happiness for the delusive, brief enjoyment promised by sin?

St. Thomas More, the great English chancellor, was condemned to death because he remained faithful to the Catholic religion. King Henry VIII had left his lawful wife Catherine, and was living with Anne Boleyn. The chancellor, however, was unwilling to consider this sinful union as a marriage, and refused to acknowledge Henry as the head of the English Church; therefore he was brought to the Tower, and sentence of death was passed upon him. The King first tried to break down the opposition of the chancellor—who was held in high esteem throughout the whole country—by the sufferings *of* imprisonment. Then he sent the chancellor's favorite daughter Margaret to urge him to yield; but in vain. Finally his wife appeared in the prison and tearfully begged him to make the required declaration and so save his life for his family. Sir Thomas quietly asked her: "How long could we still live together?" His wife replied: "Another twenty years at least." "Do you see," said the husband, "if you had said a thousand years, that would have been something. But for the sake of twenty years, shall I lose eternity?" And Thomas More went to his death. His fidelity was fortified by the thought of eternity.

If only we were to think often of the eternal God. In this world we speak of the eternal sea and of the everlasting hills, but that is only human exaggeration, is it not? We say everlasting hills and eternal sea, but only one is eternal—God, of whom alone Holy Writ says: "Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed, from eternity and to eternity Thou art God" (Ps. 89:2).

But the mountains and the sea are both sufficient reminders for us. Let us be steadfast, unchanging as the eternal mountains in character, in honor, and in morals; for then we honor the eternal God. Storms come, yet the mountain does not sway; the lightning flashes, yet the mountain does not totter. At its feet the dirt and filth of everyday life whirl, but the mud does not reach its head: like a snow-white altar it stretches heavenward.

Take the eternal sea. Unnumbered generations it has carried on its bosom—Phenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Persians, Romans, Vikings, Normans, Venetians, and Genoese; merchants, explorers, missionaries. And what has become of them all? We stand on the seashore. A terrific storm rages, causing turmoil, but only on the surface of the waters. Down below in the depths, calm reigns. So, too, in our life certainty and peace should spring from the confidence we have placed in the eternal God, even though the storms of life may cause turmoil on the surface.

You see, brethren, what the perpetuity of God proclaims to us, what strength it gives in the difficult work of improving our souls.

2) Moreover, it gives a still more splendid consolation: consolation in the whirlpool of this transient world. On New Year's Day we place a new calendar on our desk. From January to December the days follow one another in orderly succession. The exact hour and minute each day when the sun and moon rise and set, is indicated.

But the pages of the calendar say nothing about us: we cannot write in it what will happen to us next month or tomorrow, or even whether we shall live to see this tomorrow. Our span of life is so ephemeral when compared with the eternal God. We feel the truth of the poet's words:

"Life's joy is untrue, though the smile of bright heaven
look on;

We start to possess it, and lo, it is perished and gone."

—Charles Kisfaludy.

When we feel from year to year how life is slipping from our grasp, when we feel from day to day how transient this earthly existence is, and how full the whole world is of ruins, when we know that the entire earth is a vast cemetery and that the ground beneath our feet is made up of the remains of plant-life and animal-life, and when the melancholy of death sears us to the soul, at such times how good it is for us to raise our eyes toward the eternal God!

How the sunbeam trembles, coming from the sun! What does it fear? It fears the cloud which may impede its course, for that would end it. How the chicken trembles when a hawk hovers above it! What does it fear? It fears the murderous claws, for they would end its life. How the leaf trembles when the winds of autumn blow! What does it fear? It fears the blustering wind, for, if it is torn from the tree, its life is ended. And how man trembles when death knocks at his door! What does he fear? He fears the painful moment of his passing. Everything vanishes, everything passes; but God lives, God alone is eternal. God alone is great, for He alone is eternal.

Yet someone else is great, too. That man is great who can cling to the eternal God, and in this life mould the sublime features of the eternal God ever more beautifully on his own soul.

What a terrible, yet sublime contrast: the eternal God and ephemeral man! The eternal God. We contemplate Him in a peace which recognizes no time, in a peace which encompasses the fulness of life and the abundance of infinite action. Countless hosts of angels and glorified human souls sing His praise through an unbroken chain of endless centuries, *per omnia saecula saeculorum*.

The everlasting God. And here we stand, ephemeral man, in the fleeting stream of time. What is our life? A tiny ripple on the shoreless ocean of time, a fallen leaf in an immense primeval forest, a minute grain of sand in a measureless desert. What is our life? "In the morning man shall grow up like grass; in the morning he shall flourish and pass away; in the evening he shall fall, grow dry, and wither" (Ps. 89:6). Every minute is a wave, every day is a torrent, every year is a little portion of the river of our earthly life; a river which, at the moment of our death, will flow into the infinite ocean of eternity.

When? We do not know, nor is it important for us to know. Then what is important? The manner? How will that river flow into the sea? Like a parched stream of scarcely moving, muddied, swamp-water, bringing nothing with it but weeds and filth to the sea? Or as a triumphantly rushing, whirling mass of water, reaching the ocean loaded with precious treasures and valuables? How will that arrival at the sea be, at the eternal sea? That depends on ourselves. How do we wish to arrive before the everlasting God?

Dear brethren, we have spoken of the everlasting God, we whose lives are like shadows, like smoke. We have spoken of the changeless God, we whose lives change as the moon changes.

Time rushes on with us, and the whirl of life sweeps us in its train. Whither? To the sea, to the eternal sea, for we are all the sons of eternity.

When, after long and distressing wanderings, the ex-

hausted Greeks caught sight of the refreshing sea, they cried out joyfully: "*Thalatta, thalaUa*, the sea, the sea!"

Brethren, do you know what is the most beautiful earthly reward of a life spent in accordance with God's will? That holy bliss which fills our souls in our last moments. When our relatives stand at our bedside with anxious faces, and we know by their suppressed tears that the course of our earthly life is very nearly run, very near to the sea, to the eternal God, that then we may also be able to cry out:

"Greeting, sea of Eternity, for which I have yearningly
longed in the struggle of life!

Yearned for the life that has no end!

Yearned for the joy that is cloudless!

Yearned for that realm whose King is the everlasting
God!"

"Now to the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only
God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen"
(1 Tim. 1:17).

XX

THEE, O GOD, WE PRAISE

One day, not many years ago, a large cross stood in the immense square in front of the Vienna City Hall with the inscription in shining letters: "Save your soul." How did the cross come to be in the very heart of red Vienna? And where did the crowds come from, that thronged the square? Under the name of "God's Players," a company has been active for years in Austria, performing, all through the country, plays calculated to improve the morals of the people; they wished their thousandth performance to have the great publicity of the Rathaus Platz in Vienna.

This jubilee play shows in thrillingly dramatic tenseness, Satan's embittered war against God. We are at the board meeting of hell's Supreme Council, and the devil is in the chair. He is not portrayed in the manner of the Middle Ages with horns, tail, and hoofs, but in modern dress. Round the table his co-workers are seated—Pride, Avarice, Immodesty—and they pass the Council's first resolution, which declares: "God's last hour has come. We dethrone God." But, at the very moment when hell's councillors pass this audacious resolution, God's envoy appears and holds a most exciting conversation with Satan.

The heavenly ambassador says to the devil: "You think you have gained the victory, do you? See how much latent goodness is still to be found among men, how much honor, how much decency."

To this the devil mockingly replies: "In vain, in vain. Everything is already mine. The theater, the Stock Exchange, the newspapers—all serve me."

Thue the play begins. Who will be the victor? the audience asks itself in trembling anxiety. Will God be triumphant here? But, when the performance reaches an end, one gives a great sigh of relief. God has won. In their last moments the intoxicated, the immoral, the murderers one after the other in consternation make their avowal that God lives, and that man cannot hide from Him.

God lives and God is victorious. This is the final teaching of the play, this is the most profound, the one and only theme of the history of mankind, of world history, and this is the basic thought of my sermon today.

Ever since man has existed on the earth, individuals and peoples have always believed in God: and, though some were always to be found who would have liked to execute the Satanic Supreme Council's resolution of dethronement, God's throne remains steadfast today, and men still kneel in prayer before the blessed majesty of the heavenly Father. There are people who abuse God today, too. But they also fail because of this. And there are some who bless God today, too, and find their happiness in Him. In these two thoughts I will sum up my sermon today; for I intend to speak of those who abuse God, and of those who bless God.

THOSE WHO ABUSE GOD

The embittered rage against honoring God which flares up now in this country, now in that, is a startling witness to human depravity. *It is as if* that Vienna play were true, word for word. It certainly seems as though many authors, artists, theaters, films, broadcasters, and newspapers had entered Satan's service. Not only is the war against God waged by those who deny Him, who blaspheme Him; it is carried on by all who undermine honor

in human souls, who undermine clean morality, the sense of duty, and religious faith.

For many years past, from the East has come blood-curdling news of the Satanic methods employed there today in the war against God. During the three years following 1927, in Russia 14,000 churches were closed by force. Atheism is spread by a special society with official power, the League of Atheists, which claims a membership of 17,000,000 adults and also 18,000,000 children between the ages of eight and fourteen years. Its newspapers have a circulation of half a million copies. Thirty-five new professorships to spread atheism were established at the Russian universities and a complete university was founded at Minsk (in White Russia) exclusively for the organization of the war against religion. Food-tickets were refused to all persons who stood in any relation whatever to religion, and thus they were deprived of the possibility of even a bare existence; and at the same time food-tickets cannot be obtained by priests (no matter to what religion they belong), choirmasters, organists, sacristans, editors of religious newspapers, and artists who make religious articles. Truly, it is as though we saw the successful enforcement of the resolution passed by the Satanic Supreme Council. While the young members of the League of Atheists rushed into several of the remaining churches with infernal glee,—they went into many private houses also, and carried off thousands of religious pictures to be burnt in the public squares to the accompaniment of triumphant yells—while the mass and Christianity are mocked by orgies in the streets at which the people shout with laughter, and the beautiful old hymns are sung with the most wickedly blasphemous new texts, at the same time on Devil's Island in the White Sea the priests banished there are inhumanly made to slave from twelve to seventeen hours a day and receive only half-portions of food: never a day passes but several of them die, and no fellow-priest

is allowed to go to them to administer the sacraments. Some priests were caught in the act of hearing the confessions of their dying fellow-priests and were then sentenced to the hardest forest work, and their food was reduced to one-third of the prisoners' rations. Truly it is as though we were witnessing the triumph of the resolution passed by the Supreme Council of hell. The proclamation of atheism consumes immense quantities of paper; therefore an Act has been passed, ordering that every sacred book, Bible, and prayer book found in the country must be delivered up to the authorities, and from these books new paper is made for the printing of Bolshevik propaganda.

Apparently there is a lack not only of sufficient paper, but also of sufficient stone. In Moscow the worn paving stones are replaced by tombstones taken from the cemeteries, and on some of them the inscriptions are still legible.

Not far from the great capitals of Christian Europe is living a vast nation with no Sunday (for even the seven-day week has been done away with); today millions of children are living who have never heard what Christmas means.

When we read of these awful crimes day after day, we feel as the audience felt at the beginning of that Vienna play: What will happen here? Will God win the victory after all?

However, to one who is acquainted with the history of mankind and knows how often infernal wickedness has rebelled against God's throne, the future cannot be doubtful. While rational man lives on this earth, faith in God can never be eradicated from his soul. We know that, at the end of the play, at the conclusion of the world's history, God will still be victorious. And with Him those will be victorious who believe in God and who bless His holy name.

II

THOSE WHO BLESS GOD

i) Is there a God? We have already raised this question. Again and again we have considered the overwhelming evidence that points to its answer.

a) We inquired of the great outer world of the stars, and of the inner world of man's soul: living and lifeless nature, the stupendous order and conformity of the universe thundered the answer with the soul of man yearning for truth and happiness: There is a God; my reason compels me to believe in Him. The height of the great created world cries out for God, and the depths of the human soul cry out for God, too.

For, if there is no God, there is no Creator of the incomparably intricate and precise machinery of the universe; and if there is no God, human life has no goal. But could that be possible? When we do not dare to say of a pen-point or of the wheel of a machine that it came into being of itself and has no maker, then shall we dare to say this of the great, marvelous world? When there is not a leaf on the tree without its purpose, not a blade of grass in the fields, not a drop of water in the sea without its purpose, is man alone to have no goal? Tolstoi asked himself this question, too, and replied to it thus: Millions and millions live quietly, working, suffering, and striving in this earthly life, and it does not occur to them that this is all aimless. Whence proceeds their love of life, their strength to work and, their capacity to endure? Tolstoi finds no other answer than to say: From their faith placed in the all-wise and just God. And then, on a forest path-way in spring, the confession bursts from his lips: "God is. You can live only if you believe in God." (See Tolstoi, *My Confession*.) Yes, we can live only if we believe in the Lord God.

Lord God. Thus we say it in our mother tongue. But the same is said by other peoples, too. "Adonai," says the Jew. "Kurios," says the Greek. "Dominus," says the Latin. We cannot find a race to whom the idea of the creating and governing God is unknown. Everywhere man supplicates God; that is the word most often spoken on this terrestrial globe. When the rays of the rising sun first bathe in golden light the windows of the sleeping houses, then man awakes to new labors with God's name on his lips. The devout pray to Him, the poor ask alms in His name, invalids hope in Him, the dying trust in Him. There is no place, no time, no occasion in which the human soul does not think of God, does not believe in Him. It believes, because reason compels belief.

b) An ordered humane life forces us to this belief also, for without faith in God, social life becomes impossible. Can we build a humane life on destructive atheism? Can we speak of the fulfilment of duty toward our family, of consideration for our neighbor, without faith in God? Society imposes duties upon us, duties which often mean self-denial and sacrifices for the individual. Absolute faithfulness, trustworthiness, love of work, honor, the performance of duty, all are such foundations of social life, of which the final support is faith in God. Atheism shakes the foundations of human society. Someone cries out: There is no God. A sufferer hears this and exclaims: So there is no object in life. An evil-doer hears it and says: There is no sin. Youth hears it and declares: There is no virtue. A husband hears it and says: There is no conjugal fidelity. A child hears it and says: There is no parental authority.

A land without God is a land unblessed. A people without God is an undisciplined herd of blood-thirsty beasts. Can a man honor his father and mother in this world, if he does not honor his blessed Father in heaven? Can a man respect earthly laws, *if he does not* respect a heav-

only, eternal Lawgiver? Can that person love his neighbor, if he believes we all come from nothing and return to nothing, so that during the brief interval of life we must grasp as much enjoyment as possible?

If at any time the "heavenly manifestation" should not be sufficient testimony for us that God exists, then the "infernal manifestation," the reign of depravity, will prove it to us. For, if there is no God, then truth is an enigma, law and justice are enigmas, the whole system of morality is an enigma, and every man has the right to solve these according to his own taste. If there is no God, then there is no liberty either, for liberty can be built only on laws, laws on morality, and morality on religion and God.

Do you know what is inscribed upon the Mohammedan University in Cairo? I repeat it with a certain amount of envy and shame—above the Mohammedan University. "Chemistry is important, God is more important": that is the inscription.

Yes indeed, chemistry is needed, and technology also is needed, industry is needed, agriculture is needed, bread is needed, clothes are needed, hygiene is needed, also sunshine is needed. But above all this, God is needed. Anybody whose only light is from the sun, remains in darkness every night; but if his sun is God, for him eternal light shines.

We are ill; we all feel it. But do you not believe that the modern world is ill because it has gone far from God, has broken away from Him? When people in northern countries are deprived of the sun when it hides below the horizon, they fall a prey to dejectedness and melancholy. Melancholy is stifling modern humanity; men have turned away from the life-giving Sun.

The Arabs have a splendid saying about the weeping of the Sahara. When a light zephyr sweeps across the endless sand-wastes on calm and starry nights, beating millions of tiny grains of sand one against, another, the

murmur sounds like the agonized whimpering of some gigantic wild beast, wounded to the death. "Do you hear?" says the Arab chief to his caravan at such times; "The desert is weeping. She laments that she has become a barren waste; she mourns for her blossoming gardens, the billowing wheat fields, the smiling orchards with which she was once overflowing, before she become a parched and desolate waste."

Unbelievers are also parched and desolate souls. They may outwardly appear as though everything were in order. But when, in the quiet of the night, they sit on the side of their bed, when the soul within them, which has become a parched waste because of their unbelief, cries out hopelessly for its withered flowers and faded joys, at such times the poet's words become only too true:

"Beauty and Purity and Right,
Ye words I smiled to view,
Ah, if my sinful heart had died
When I smiled down on you.
Kindness and Chastity and Good,
For you is now my need.
Christ is my trust, for Christ I wait,
I'm sick, I'm sick indeed."

—Andrew Ady.

Oh, yes, I believe in God, I believe in God.

2) Now, after speaking so much about our blessed God, when I should like to sum up these reflections in a few thoughts, the story of Moses and the burning bush occurs to me. Moses hears the words of God, but God Himself he does not see. Greatly affected, he asks: "Lo, I shall go to the children of Israel. . . . If they should say to me: What is His name? What shall I say to them?" (Ex. 3:13.)

Is not this our question also? Everywhere we are in God, in Him we live and move; but the burning question

is: Who is this God? Who is this majestic invisible One? And the Lord replied to Moses: "I am who am." Later He says: "Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: He who is, hath sent me to you" (Ex. 3:14).

Who is God? What a magnificent word, "God"! We have only to utter it, and an endless ocean billows before us—the infinite sea of sublimity, beauty, goodness, and perfection. Every human word about God is but a helpless stammering, for His greatness is immeasurable. His strength is omnipotence, His time is eternity, and His habitation is "light inaccessible" (I Tim. 6:16).

What is God like? What shall I say of this God? Shall I say He is the infinite ocean of all being? Shall I say: In Him is everything that is contained in the whole created world—mountains, seas, stars, electricity, animals, men and angels together? Shall I say: In Him is all the beauty and harmony that emanates from the calm silence of a starry night; in Him is all the majesty that is silent upon the snow-covered peaks of immense mountains; in Him is all the loveliness that now and then sweeps across the face of an innocent child? Shall I say: In Him is all the truth, the love, the sympathy, the charm that we find among men? Have I said enough? No.

Well, then, what is God like? What shall I say of God? Holy Writ paints more and more beautiful features of God's loveliness; but now I emphasize only two magnificent thoughts, as a frame for all His attributes—God is light and God is love.

God is light (I John 1:15). If He is light, He sees all, shines everywhere, and there is no darkness in Him. If He is light, He knows everything, and there is no error in Him. If He is light, He is sheer holiness, and there is no blemish, no lack, no fault, no sin in Him. If He is light, He is eternal harmony and the source of all beauty: the primeval source of all natural, artistic, spiritual, and moral beauty of color, tone, and form. If He is indeed

light, there is no sorrow, mourning, or ill-humor in Him.

Moreover God is love. If He is love, all love springs forth from Him: the maternal heart, the childlike affections, self-sacrificing friendship. If He is love, He is nothing but goodness, nothing but loving solicitude. If He is love, He is the most worthy of love.

Now what shall I say of God as a final summing up? What else could I say than St. Ambrose said of Him: "Do you wish to heal your wounds? He is the physician. Does the fire of fever burn you? He is the refreshing spring. Do you fall beneath the weight of your wrongdoings? He is the eternal justice. Do you need help? He is omnipotent power. Do you fear death? He is life. Do you earnestly long for the kingdom of heaven? He is the Lord. Do you want to flee from the darkness? He is light. Do you hunger for nourishment? He is the bread of life" (*De virginitate*, chap. 16).

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. These thoughts, and thoughts like them, I have expressed about God. Do we now know what God is like? Have we removed the veil of Sais from His face? Do we now know God fully? How could I dare to say that: How could I dare to contradict the word of God, which says: "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face" (I Cor. 13:12)?

Do you hear, brethren? Then we shall see God face to face. When will this "then" be? When will this great unveiling take place, the unveiling of God? When from my own soul the veil (that is, my body) falls away. Today my body keeps me from seeing God. But if the veil falls, and the soul leaves the body, in that moment I shall see God. Take good heed to what I now say. For one moment everyone will see Him: but there are some who will see Him only for a moment. God will be seen for a moment by those who abused Him—abused Him by their way of life, by their blasphemy, by their denial—but these, after

the moment of judgment, go to eternal punishment. Those, however, who lived according to the will of God, who blessed and loved Him, will remain with Him forever.

I love God. I love God, the infinitely good Father, whose majesty awes but does not frighten, does not benumb. I open my heart, I open my arms wide, and fly toward the great God with the same confidence a little child feels hurrying to its mother, though she be a queen.

I love God, the gentle-hearted Ruler of the world. I love Him even if in this life He leads me along rugged paths to the end.

I love God, the ocean of life, from whom all beauty and goodness emanate, in whom every soul buds, from whom the maternal heart draws its flame, from whom every hymn of victory peals.

I love God, praise God, bless God. I believe, I believe that one day I shall see God forever.

My Lord, I am a pale seedling; but Thou art the life-giving sunbeam.

My Lord, I am poor; Thou art eternal riches.

My Lord, I am weary; Thou art eternal rest.

My Lord, I am weak; Thou art all power.

My Lord, I am a sinner; Thou art forgiveness.

I am forlorn; Thou art two open arms.

I am unhappy; Thou art the sympathizing heart.

I am thirsty; Thou art the source of living water.

I am hungry; Thou art the bread of life.

I am the night; Thou art the glorious day.

I am a man, a man; and Thou art my Lord God forever and forever.

In Thee, O Lord, is our hope. Do not let us ever be confounded. Amen.

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